



RISE UP SINGING:
An Anthology of Women s
Poetry & Prose

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RISE UP SINGING:
An Anthology of Women s
Poetry & Prose
edited by

CYNTHIA BACHELOR [Ed.]
and assisted by
ELHAM BEAULIEU and
MEGAN WALKER

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literarynewscpa@yahoo.ca

Dedicated to Marcella Schmor, my grandmother, whose own stories of womanhood both fascinated and inspired me. Alas, these stories were never recorded. It is for this reason that I want to encourage women to write and share their ideas and stories by committing them to paper.

Cynthia Bachelor

Acknowledgments

On behalf of the London Abused Women's Centre, I would like to thank several individuals who helped create this treasured anthology of women's poems and stories.

First and foremost, thank you to the brilliant female authors who so generously shared their work with us. Your words evoke a range of emotion from deep sadness to spontaneous happiness. We are so grateful for your contributions.

To Rachelle Dickenson, artist extraordinaire, thank you for so accurately capturing our theme, Rise up Singing, in your beautiful artwork. We so proudly display it on the front cover.

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Enjoy the anthology and seek hope from its words.

Megan Walker
Executive Director

On behalf of the London Chapter of the Canadian Poetry Association, I wish to thank the City of London and the London Arts Council for their contributions and support for this project.

Wayne Ray
The Canadian Poetry Association: London Chapter

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Introduction

This anthology of women's poetry and prose is a compilation of entries received by the London Abused Women's Centre in response to a literary contest held in the fall of 2002. Entries were received from as far away as Switzerland and from as close as our own backyard.

These poems and stories are emotionally charged. Some reflect feelings of sadness and pain, while others reflect hope and joy. The honesty, courage shared by the authors are inspirational.

It is our hope that you will enjoy reading the anthology and share it with your friends and family.

By Cynthia Bachelor, Elham Beaulieu and Megan Walker

My women sing
Judie Land

The women in my family
are singing up a storm:
snuggling lullabies,
down pouring in soft rain;
grandstanding marches,
heating up in the sun;
freeing hope songs,
burning off angry smog;
lifting jazz,
clearing out shifty mist.

The women in my family
are weathering the storm,
singing out to one another,
sounding their wheres and whens
echoing their whys,
attaching themselves,
their voices,
through climates cold and hot,
lush and stark,
to one another s score.

The women in my family
sing in stormy weather,
and somewhere over the rainbow,
ageless voices rise up.
It is a hurricane of love,
swirling me calm,
lofting me
on high, descant wind,
swooping me sure and low
to ride a sustained alto hum.

The women in my family
are serenading me,
their instruments fine-tuned
to ice-clear resonance.
Their voices slow

to an adagio,
as they release their stories
across today's balmy blue.
I join the chorus,
my voice first thin and tremulous,
then, breathing deep
the notes of my women,
I orchestrate a symphony,
written across the sky
in the key of me.

Barren Terrain

Ruth Brainis

You've entered the twilight zone
The terrain of my heart
Encased in thick glass
Surrounded by a barbed wire fence;
The most precious part of me
It lies deep beneath my façade
Well hidden by walls of brick
Which I have carefully built
To keep you out

Burden

E. G. Damas

She lifts the vessel filled with the residue of time
and places it in a corner. Take bread and wine
and start the evening without me.

The boards creak and interrupt the chaos outside,
cars rush along the street, crash against the yellow
gate and no one will know tomorrow.

See the cat lick her paws. Throw the water on the stairs
so she will not leave a trail behind.
The bell in the tower strikes.

The woman carries bags filled with plates and leftovers
from yesterday's expectations; she moves down the stairway,
leans over, picks up the evidence, the odds and ends
that fall out indiscriminately.

She grasps the bowl and spills the white milk on the dark ground. She will not cry behind the door.
Nothing will grow.

Inner Song
Deb Mines

I am an ordinary woman.
I m your mother, neighbour, friend.
I am your coworker, boss, sister, daughter.
I work hard, laugh, shop, struggle.

Today I am battered.
The voice is cruel -
Calling me names, putting me down.
The hands are hard - Hurting me, knocking me down
Making me bleed.

I go inside myself
To my safe spot .
You can not hurt me there.
It is my sacred zone -
My point of survival.

In that core part of me
The voices sing -
Have faith , you are good ,
You can be strong , you are beautiful !

I know this time I will use that inner song -
To leave, to restore, to heal.
I am more than an ordinary woman.
I am strong, a survivor,
A loving, giving, caring woman.

I pull myself up from the floor -
Listening only to the singing!

The Transfer
Suzanne Dennison

Amazing that slips of paper
Can carry such weight:
Mind mulls over meanings
Sitting up so late
Dreaming how to transfer
The curve of fate
Such that we pull together
For it s never too late
To re-activate a passion
Too genuine to decay
As long as brain cells wander
Thru memory s embrace.

Adding fuel when needed
Before the heart breaks
By standing with you
Transferring love s grace.

(Untitled)
Tracy Stirling

a long, lingering kiss
I tug at your lower lip
suck and bite it
we look in each other s eyes
they are half closed with
passion and joy
we begin our exploration
of the other s body
kissing, licking,
devouring it all
your scent and taste remain
in my memory and keep me
company through long,
lonely days

It s Not Hard Being Alone

Catherine Inculet

It s not hard
being alone
but it s difficult
being left that way.
I can t say
that I d blame
you for taking
some time from me.
It s not as if
you re stealing.
I m giving
it freely,
but sometimes I wish
that I didn t have
to ask
for it back

(Untitled)
Tracy Stirling

sitting
waiting for coffee to brew
low murmur of the radio
like wallpaper
- present but not immediately noticeable -
it's raining again
that slow
misty drizzle
I've grown accustomed to
the world is hazy
and undefined
powdery green and greys
a day to be watched
from a big
soft
chair

Sunbathing
Claudia C. Morrison

She sits on an old, frayed blanket,
staring at the rows of brick apartments
that glare at her in the sun.

Years ago her father's mother died of TB.
Her father believes she will too,
and that only the sun can save her.

Her summer vacations therefore consist
of sitting in the backyard
without lotion, without radio.
(The cord would not reach that far).

The glare is such she can't even read.
She can do nothing but sit:
for hours.

Boredom prompts creative spurts.
She learns the ukelele, squinting at the chords.

She finds an old anthology of poems
and memorizes The Harlot's House
(and down the long and silent street,
the dawn, with silver-sandalled feet,
creeps like a frightened girl).

It cools her to recite it.
She doesn't know what a harlot is.
She is the frightened girl.

She lies flat on her stomach,
writhes against the heat, angrily
pulling up fistfuls of grass.

What is there to do? she wails.
The sun glares with her father's will.
It glares with her hate.

Later in life she will see freedom
as the freedom to do unhealthy things.
She will avoid the sun, which by the time

she is fifty stands her in good stead,
the sun having since grown lethal,

its ozone cocoon ragged and stretched.

She will also distrust men,
but this too carries a hidden plus:

she will early learn what types to shun,
those who give orders, force on her
their will.

Ascension
Sarah Faulkner

sheltered and nourished
the fruits sprout on ancient branches,
gleaming reflections
of a root, primal and daring.
squinting through eyes of bloodless yearning
I grasp at gnarly pebbled skin eager to clench
in smooth, creaseless hands, a taste of ether.

Too far from that maternal stalk
I swing bravely, clutching for winds or mighty wings - -
my dangling feet pedal blindly, at war with gravity
for a time.

The root of rebellion sinks deep into my womb
and cradles the girl child that is me.

It is for others now to wrestle these branches of old,
the fruit rests easily in my palm.

(Untitled)
Victoria Helen Dill

Me. Woman.
With a body that is magical
and a soul that can soar to unbelievable heights
With the strength to overcome weakness
and a heart that can rise above fear
With oceans of capability
and forever possibilities
With laughter that can shake the mountains
and eyes that radiate beautiful songs
With a mind, a mind that can never be ignored
and a voice I choose to be heard
With the power to accomplish
and the choice to never look down
With all the warmth in the world
Me. Woman.

Shadowdancing

Sarah Faulkner

Ravens

four, in circular

motion

fly above me.

Their shadows

evershifting,

moving in harmony.

To call them

I open my hands

and sing the raven call.

They fly over me,

weave shadows

with mine.

I am part of raven now,

though cannot fly with easy curve

or leave the earth on

black wings beating --

In shadows, we dance,

Four

ravens and

I.

Special Delivery
Sherry L. Smith

Each new-come child
is a fragile package
concealing your most precious
hopes and dreams;
a tiny bundle
of cries and whimpers
tightly wrapped
in a lifetime of possibilities.
The wisdom of the ages
is reflected in the sparkle
of an infant's wondering eyes;
his delicate fingers grasp
at all the world has to offer.
Stoney faces soften
and hardened hearts melt
when confronted with the innocence
of a newborn's simple smile.
In your arms
you cradle his future;
in your heart
you hold your own.
Embrace with love and care!

Woman
Sherry L. Smith

Image a world without
the soft caress of a mother's touch
a diva's song
a lover's blush.
With no sisters to share
our secrets
the soul records a solemn hush.

What father does not seek
his own perfection
in the mirror of his daughter's eyes?
What daughter does not seek
a true reflection
of the father she must idolize?

Many are the contributions
in every sphere of life
of women who express their joy
free from hatred, war and strife.

Erase the roles all women play
from birth to death to birth
and contemplate in greatest depth --
Would man walk upon the Earth?

The Glass Wall
Sherry L. Smith

Each day I must leave
my sanctuary
and pass through the showered,
coiffed, designer-clad masses
who feign to rule the world.

I am but a stranger
peering through
a wall of glass, smeared
by the fingers of those
who've dipped their hands
into too many corporate pies.

I ponder the motives and the methods
of these would-be rulers
who are ignorant of my eyes
seeking to delve
the depths of their inner being.
Yet the secrets of the self-absorbed
remain intact,
as does the wall protecting them
from seekers such as I.

One by one, they pass me by
in their shiny status symbols.
But I can see through
more than their tinted glass.
I remain invisible.
As invisible as the wireless airwaves
over which they spread
their lies.

Lady of the Night
Sherry L. Smith

Last night, through my window,
I gazed upon the moon.
Its full luminescence
glowing softly on the ruin.

Through the dark haunting trees
shone the moon's silent light
casting unearthly shadows
upon the Lady of the Night.

Locked in time, eyes downcast,
at first glance, merely sleeping.
Only slowly did I perceive
tragic maiden, eternal weeping.

What longing must reside
in this ancient work of art;
this immortal alabaster
to grip a stranger's heart?

The moonlight rays have shifted.
No longer do they reveal
this young girl's heavy sadness
nor her arms' upraised appeal.

In thought and deep emotion
I forced my gaze away,
but her secret silent hopelessness
remains in me this day.

The Runner's Return

Wendy Lycett

my lips
trace
your throat
taste
yoursweet
soul
in a kiss
you are indigo
and morning
vanilla
and sand
you are all
sensation, texture
image
and emotion
I bathe
in the meaning
you bring
to my reason
you are
my clean Delphi fires.

In Heavy Rain
Suzanne Dennison

Too much time alone, too many memories
Can block perception of what surrounds:
This actual gift, life in motion,
Perpetual change. Tho to love bound
By choice, that time together
Still fills the heart with warmth thru sounds
That call to mind the joy we d found
So long ago, that always lingers
Deep in the tunnels of the mind,
Then floating to the surface
Listening to those tunes.

Wondering if the thought of me
Lingers when he s alone?
Could he ever have that urge
To hold me tight again?
Let flow free those passions
Buried deep within the brain?

Tis only idle daydreams,
Orbs brightening in heavy rain.

At The Centre

Suzanne Dennison

Caught every evening sifting
Thru memory s mesh
For certain rays to illuminate
All that circles thru the head
When I push the recall button
Motivating you to share my bed.

Tho I know it s only mental
I choose that dream until I m dead:
The perfect method is all that music,
The only door forever open,
All-pervasive sounds of saxophones
Guitars, piano, bass - the instruments
That lead me back to you
Flowing thru my mind continuously

Is why I you cannot separate
At the centre of my head.
You are the door that opened
All that jazz to a starving brain,
Filled it with that rich embrace
Consuming every day.

breaking with the anchor

Kathleen Kemp Haynes

the clock ticks rhythmically all day,
measuring her minutes, relegating them
to the past.

the refrigerator clicks on automatically
as it chills, and has chilled, her sustenance
all her married life.

in the bedroom the clock radio shrills petulantly
that it is time to lift her head off the pillow
she hasn't been on.

outside she hears her now former neighbour start
his lawnmower early. his schedule, too,
must have changed.

today she will pick up her suitcases and boxes
and leave behind a lifetime commitment she
had intended to keep.

a little excited, but sorrowful, about this change
that will alter her relationships and tear up
her personal anchor.

Watch Me
Andrea Venantius

I ve decided
that I
am going
to keep you
Alive.

Not only
through photographs,
memories,
words.

Not only
in remembrance
of all
that you taught me.

But, especially,
by being
what you,
and only you,
saw
in me.

A Divine Oath

Joan Borja

I, The Goddess
Do solemnly swear
To uphold this promise
To take the utmost care
Of the sanctity of my altar
The honour of my throne
And the blossoming seeds in my garden
I have meticulously sown
And painstakingly grown

This vow of dignity
This oath of self-love
I pledge to fulfill
All else above
Amidst the scourge of loneliness
Or the agony of emotional strife
I shall not desecrate my temple
Lest it be a matter of death and life
No bewitching scoundrel
No charming knave
Shall set foot in my temple
Lest I fall to my grave

This may be harsh and unnerving
But no one undeserving
Should be allowed to tread on such sacred earth
Why let maleficent swine
Taint my immaculate shrine?
I know who I am
& I know what I am worth.

(Untitled)

Tracy Stirling

dozens of lights twinkling
at the base of
an awe inspiring mountain
dancing
in the twilight
mountains
of blues and grays
almost hidden
in the late evening mist
layered
one in front of another
soul food
of beauty
for those
who have
the spiritual eyes
to
taste
it

(Untitled)

Tracy Stirling

unable to caress your face,
your essence has touched mine,
like fog
they approach,
thin, wispy,
no sharp barriers
to keep the other away,
slowly
they mingle,
intertwine,
an intimacy deeper than flesh,
they gain in substance
and impenetrability,
the world is locked out,
right now there is only
us

First coming

Oonagh Berry

It was Easter time.
In the back seats of the cinema
we huddled in the dark.
I don't recall his name, only the film.
As Richard Burton tramped his way
through biblical times,

he fingered me between my legs,
moving gently up and down
until I shook.

Not knowing what was happening,
I couldn't wait to get home
and try it out on myself.

No wonder Richard Burton was my favourite film star.

Conquest
Oonagh Berry

Late summer evening in the hayfield.
Wendy and I sprawled out,
well hidden from the eyes of the farmer.
Flattening the hay with our bodies,
we talked, laughed and sang.
The previous evening, Jack Ryan had kissed me.
I relived the moment, telling her
how he had looked at me
how I closed my eyes when we kissed,
how my toes tingled,
how out of breath I was.

She envied me that first kiss.
I never did tell her that the next day
he wrote in my autograph book:
veni, vidi, vici.

Someone who watched over me
for my mother
Oonagh Berry

When you watched me bathe,
did you wonder what it was like
to be a fourteen year old virgin?
Did you envy me my burgeoning breasts,
and velvet black V
untouched by man?

That summer evening,
you sat on the edge of the bath, chatting
as I splashed water over my body.
Suddenly he barged in drunk,
and lunged towards me.
Your five foot three inch body pushed him out.
That was the night you told me
to lock my bedroom door.
Did you wonder then
why no one had been there for you?

Bloodline
Oonagh Berry

Two a.m. in the morning.
I feel the sticky heat
of blood everywhere.
Mom hands me a cloth;
I place it on my belly button.
No, not there, between your legs.
Shocked, I look into her eyes.
Don't worry, go back to sleep.
You are a woman now.

The kiss
Oonagh Berry

Bless me father for I have sinned:
I have told lies,
I teased my brothers and sisters,
I forgot my morning prayers,
I disobeyed my parents,
I committed adultery.

I heard his intake of breath behind the grill.
With a married man? he hissed.
No, I replied confused: he s only seventeen.
You mean you had intercourse?
Yes father, I suppose so.

For penance, say three rosaries.
If you come here again with that sin,
there will be no absolution:
Now, an act of contrition.
Yes father, I whispered.
Shamefully I intoned the words
Oh my God, I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee...

Stumbling out of the confessional,
I prayed I was not pregnant:
his tongue had not entered my mouth.

Midnight sensuality

Diana Van-Do

When you hold me in your arms at night,
as you caress my skin,
passionately kissing my lips and body,
I dream of my beloved Saigon.
Surrounded by the bluest water,
and the oasis that awaits me.
Your love for me is masked by untold truths.
Lies live beneath our deepest realities.
I dream of the man I desire you to be.
Desire, death is out of our control.
My life with you is nothing but a fantasy.
I swallow your broken promises like an unsatiable hunger.
You cannot fill my heart, for you do not love me.
My pain lies in not having courage to leave.
Your deceit becomes my deceit.
Your touch becomes my agony.
I feel pleasures move within me.
A sense of death engulfs me as I lie here,
naked,
body to body wrapped.
Lips to lips,
seeking each other.
Diving further into oblivion,
not without consequences.

(Untitled)

Jenny Keene

Dried blood
Face stuck to the pillow
Skin and cloth
Joined by the now dead cells.

Heart raging
Chained
Stunned
The mirror later
Oh horror, gasps
Monster face
Twisted, distorted
Purple and black
Yellow and wine
Lumpy, swollen
eyes
No life in them
Dead cells.

Were you in a car accident?
The man pushing the stretcher asks.
From the hollow within
a voice says only
No.

Starvation
Ruth Brainis

Paper white, paper thin
Bones protrude through flesh
Shrunken stomach, sagging skin
Think you re prettiest near death?
Starving to feel beautiful
Starving to fit in
Sunken eyes dulled from pain
Self hate burns and body is a sin
Hair falling from your head
Too weak to face another day
Waiting silently, wasting slowly
Till the winds of your ill blow you away

Those Women
Mildred Tremblay

When was it God stopped listening to me
turned away to stare out the window
left me mumbling my act of confession

into the hairy ear of the priest
who was another one
God had stopped listening to

When was it I stopped listening to priests
began listening to women
far out on the barbed-wire edges

calling back to me
the lost names
of the rivers and valley of Eve

Unwelcome Mat
Ruth Brainis

Please stay where you are
Outside of my door
Please don't enter uninvited
Don't tell me your name
Don't show me the light in your eyes
Please keep a distance from my heart
I've known too many
I've lost too much
My heart won't withstand being broken again
Too many shared moments
Lost in the tides of life
Too many abrupt good-byes
Too many feelings
Too many tears cried
Too much heartache came from caring
I need to heal from a turbulent past
And hide out in a haven of solitude
I don't want to let you make me smile or laugh
Don't let me feel a future in your touch
I am tired of breaking like a fragile glass
I am afraid of being disappointed
So please understand
When I pass you by unnoticed
I won't let myself cherish your being
Only to have you vanish
Leaving me swirling with the dust
Of the memories we've made

Birth Poem.
Mildred Tremblay

This very moment, a woman
is coming to the end of her labour.
For a day and a night
her life has been reduced to this room, this bed,
and the hard round roof of her belly.
Under the roof, the universe is busy
and somewhere inside the woman's heart,
between her pleas for an end to the pain,
the wildest of jubilations
 leans on the door, waiting.

Another contraction. Her body is caught
dragged by the horses of heaven and hell
and she knows there is only one path
over this mountain, and no turning back.

Her tired mind touches the baby, its tiny
frog body, fists like curled ferns.
She knows it is frightened, it has a hold of its knees,
it has tucked in its head, it prepares for arrival.

Now the woman hears someone shrieking.
She feels a terrifying urge
 to open every gate of her being,
no defenses left, she is nailed.
For a second she holds back...then
she surrenders, she surrenders.

Raindrops

Penny Gumbert

I'm holding my breath, eyes closed. Raindrops begin to explode on the metal roof, at first slowly, then faster and faster, my heart racing in time. The bed squeaks as I jump up, feet hitting the floor. It's been almost a year since the last time, the first time. Too long. I ache to do it again, be free, all atingle. The waiting's nearly over. It's going to happen again, today. Soft footsteps are coming down the hall. Finally.

I tear off my T-shirt, throwing it against the closet door. It lands on the knob, defiantly. Good girls are neat, you know. My shorts and panties are next. I'm naked now, eager for it. I fall back onto the bed, gripping my buttocks. I thrust my hips in the air and break into a bicycle run. My tummy accordion-pleated makes me laugh. The rhythm of the raindrops beckons. Better hurry. I need one more thing.

I roll over out of bed, landing on the carpet, on my chest. Ouch. Will it leave a mark? Hope not. I grab the handles of the dresser and yank. Out flies the drawer. Clothes bounce out, an eruption of pastels and fluorescents.

There's my favourite bathing suit, lime green with orange popsicles. I jump into it feet first and pull it up over my body. Grandma comes to the bedroom door.

Are you ready? It's raining!

Oh yes, Gram! Mommy never lets me play in the rain.

I Hate Hockey

Penny Gumbert

Hockey is sickening.

Even snippets of a hockey broadcast make me nauseous. The commentator's rushing pace, the rising pitch, they make shudders charge up my spine as surely as a puck plummets down the ice, hitting where it hurts. Abruptly it's the middle of the last century and I see Grandma's sepia living room, its scratchy chocolate sofa, the huge walnut radio, yellowed newsprint. Mournful images threaten. I ignore them. But Mommy and Grandma come into focus, silk dresses whistling softly. Creamy dishes clatter quietly. Suddenly I'm sweating.

Where's my brother and Daddy? Gone for a walk. Grandma goes into the kitchen. I hear her pouring water. Mommy has the last of the pie plates, still sticky with meringue, and leaves the room. Stay here, Mommy. Please. My heart's racing.

Grandpa wants to hear the hockey game. Can he hear the ugly noises in my head? I'm on the rug beside the big radio, hugging my dolly. It'll be okay. Close your eyes, dolly. Grandpa leans over. I feel hot breath, smell beer. He turns a knob. The hockey game gets louder. Grandpa lifts me onto his lap. No! I want to get down. But he's too strong. I go limp. Dolly falls, and cries, her face pressed into the rug. Grandpa rustles the newspaper, putting it in front of me. I am too young to read. Are there pictures? No. Grandpa is hiding what he does to me.

He shoots! He scores!

Hockey makes me sick.

(Untitled)

Jenny Keene

It s hard to explain
Though I saw a picture once
Cover of an album
I couldn t look for long
My memory
Looking at me
Screaming agony
Me in the nightmare
That was real
And still haunts

It s hard to explain
Don t want you to know it
like I did
No sharing, no giving
of pain
Yet it wants to come out
Want it rid of me
Do I have to give it
To lose it?
Do I have to tell it
To be free?
Details only sensationalize vomit.

It s hard to explain
But burning the story once
I wrote it and felt
the good in destroying
the truth
Not to be shared
But to be exposed
To the clean air
Into flame
Into smoke
And ash

Tossed in the garbage
Left to rot
With the rest of the waste.
It s hard to explain.

Fifteen Years Old

Leona A. Naylor

Fifteen years old
Raped and left for dead
Not buried in a grave
But in my heart
Married at seventeen
One child a beautiful baby boy
Pregnant once again
But the joy is gone
Raped over and over again
By a husband, a father
Belief in marriage now gone
A baby girl delivered
Hated from her birth
Growing, surviving, learning, living
Today I sing a joyful song
Time heals all wounds
Forgiveness by the grace of God
Forgotten the evil of the devil
For in this lifetime
I sing a new song
I sing today of peace
I am a survivor.

After the Storm
Bernice Lever

Barren rock, hinting of silver and old gold
as blues and greys dry off
after the downpour,
so eroded shoreline warms
in the aftermath of Heaven's tears.

Dark navy clouds leaving the horizon
have soft fringes of sunlight.
There are even outlines of dark green
pines on the far shore
promising growth
from this northern rock and lake

All elements are here for life:
earth, water, and a sky of air.
We just have to believe in that light:
the promise of another sunrise.

Din of Morning
Kate Marshall Flaherty

Sisterhood of rising ritual --
when the sun first blinks
its droopy-lidded eye
into matins
and every woman
awakes to mix for mouths,
(open like fledgling birds
awaiting a worm at dawn in their nest.)
Some grinding and pounding
millet with mortar and pestle,
some flicking off foil to thaw
on defrost,
some gnawing on hunger's sharp
splinters of bones
with empty calabash.
And you, in the din of morning's
train trestle, babysnuffle, throat-
clearing and twittering Toronto birds,
you mix your wisdom with your kashi,
nourishing your family
with the bread broken in motherhood

Father
Kathleen Abley

there you are
hunkered down
the winter of your life
has placed a cap
of frost about your head
a beaded smudge
above your lip
that grin
tipped white

of the two lovers you have known
neither will see you to the grave
your wife given up to the death
then alcohol
in your attempt to live
a few more years

so there you are
gathering twigs and brush
to light a fire
that words won't freeze
in the frigid space
between us

The Dragon Slayers
Jan Gladstone

She asked me to forgive her
For a wound far in the past
It had been ignored for decades
But was the kind of hurt that lasts
It was embarrassing to bring it
To the light of day at tea
It usually swam in darkness
And avoided her and me
She asked if I remembered
How could I forget the fact?
For it had marred our friendship
One that we both wanted back
It took courage to confront the beast
We'd pretended wasn't there
But once she said, I'm sorry
It was replaced by something rare
It melted like a thaw in March
When bitter winds turn warm
A peacefulness surrounded me
Protecting me from harm
And on that afternoon in spring
Over sunny cups of tea
A jewel of pure beauty
Began to crystalize in me
We embraced and I forgave her
For friendship is a treasure
And we had learned before too late
The value of its measure
When we are white-haired ladies
In the future, I foresee
We'll be thankful for the day we spent
Slaying dragons over tea

The Escape
Irene Livingston

I m free! I m free! I ve sung my babes
to sleep and called my sister, burbled out the news:
I ve bent his iron bars, and walked away.
We cried into each others ears.
And now my eyes go strolling
in my new surroundings, spare but unpossessed
of any scent of pain or taint of fear.

I fall to bed and close exhausted eyes,
and all the light, sure-footed words
come jumping from my open-gated brain,
rolling, tumbling, all a-daze and joyful,
digging up my fallow fields of hope
and churning them to bedlam.
They skip and trip in circles,

cavorting uncaring in skittery,
irrelevance to past or tipsy present.
They leap and spring from cliff to cliff,
click quicksilver hoofs on peaks
of images that rise and rise, that gleam
on moonless borders of the night,

until at last the silver
hoofs begin to slide on sandy
ledge of caving image, slip dimly down
the gray cotton edges of night,
the cotton edges of gray night
skid softly softly into a long blissful stream.

Total
Jenny Keene

I loved him
With my black and blue face
And the shame and disgrace
He inflicted.

I loved him
I lied and protected
And further subjected
All of me

I loved him
Though fear strangled each vein
And I felt my life drain
Faced with weapons

I loved him
Isn't that what it should take
For him to then see his mistake?
But it wasn't

I loved him
More than body and soul
More than he would ever know
And I left him

I loved him
This was important to say
Hardest thing: to get away
Applaud please.

I loved him
And If you blame only me
You don't know that hell breathes
And thank heaven.

I Rise Up Singing

Nadine Wark

Shackled in my soul and mind,
By unseen chains that surely bind,
My own self-worth I need find,
But still I rise up singing.
With the dawn of a brand new day,
With these four walls I cannot say,
I must go and find another way,
And I must rise up singing.
What others failed to do for me,
I ll do for myself, for I am free,
And life is good, so let it be,
And I must rise up singing.
Forsaken, chastened, scorned am I,
But things can change and by and by,
All of the odds I will defy,
And I will rise up singing.
One voice am I, but there are more,
The secret lives behind each door,
Will not be stifled evermore,
And we all will rise up singing.
Sisters of one voice will sing,
A melody that freedom brings,
Unseen chains will lose their sting,
And we all rise up singing.

Young Woman s Eyes
Mary-Ellen Kendall

There s a young woman s eyes in this old woman s face
Amid all these lines I wish I could erase
I once felt such pride, though I feel no disgrace,
There s a young woman s eyes in this old woman s face

There s a young woman s guts in this old woman s frame
The bravery and fire of my youth still remain
They re burning inside me - Can you feel the flame?
There s a young woman s guts in this old woman s frame

There s a young woman s heart in this old woman s skin
A heart that still beats with a thunderous din
Still wanting the love and the joy to come in
There s a young woman s heart in this old woman s skin

So girl, don t you judge me when you see my lines
My stoop and my wrinkles; they re only the signs
Of a lady who s working her way to divine
This lady is you in a matter of time

Candles

Kate Marshall Flaherty

wax in waning eloquence
and stand on supple spines,
drip-tipsy with warmth
and glowing amber haloes,
They are my friends,
honeysmelling dinner guests
that mingle and murmur,
cast shadows on the dull spots,
send glistenings onto goblets
and radiate across my tablespread.
Resplendent lovers, they
kiss my neck-hollow with gold
and dip a playful finger in my red wine.
Fading as I do at the tapered end of an evening,
they melt me to sleep in a gentle pool.

Found?
Cindy Fortin

Age enhanced photograph...blond hair, blue eyes, a birthmark on his right shoulder in the shape of a crescent moon with a tail, a slight, curvy scar on his upper lip...

Elizabeth Marshall looks carefully to her right...not wanting to give away her scrambling thoughts, but to re-examine the young man who has taken the seat next to her on the park bench. It could be him, she thinks hopefully.

It is possible that his mop of blond curly hair is cut shorter now, and the colour matured to a light shade of brown. He would be sixteen, after all - not the same five year-old child snatched from a playground swing more than a decade ago.

You're too obsessed with this, Liz, she could hear her husband Gerry say. What are the chances of you ever coming across a missing child? For Cripes sake, there are more than thirty million people living in Canada!

Liz had turned away from the child faces on her computer screen then, like she did the young man sitting beside her now. Perhaps Gerry was right. There are cases of missing children in nearly every city across the country these days. She is only one person. How could she ever hope to take a notch out of those figures?

Gerry had questioned her motives. Would finding a lost child help to fill the void in their own childless lives?

Liz looks sideways at the young man, and smiles, friendly.

He smiles back at her, and together they stare out at the breezy water in front of them and pretend to watch the sailboat gliding by at a whisper. He is wearing a creased, sleeveless T-shirt and a pair of faded blue shorts, she noticed, - with the physique of a twig. Was he eating well enough? If only she was sitting on the other side, she could check for that birthmark. She wants to ask him - just come right out and say it:

Hello, young man. Is your name Michael Fraser?

But she can imagine the scenario...

He would look at her - probably *stare*. What?! Where did you come up with that, lady? Can't a person come down and enjoy the serenity of the water alone, in peace?

But he hadn't come alone.

There was a man, and an old, rust-stippled truck and camper parked five spots down from her car. The man had spoken to - or more like *grunted* at - the boy, instructing him to keep his backside planted while he scrounged up some supplies at the store. He'd stomped off then, across the street behind them without so much as another glance at his son.

If his *son*, he truly *is*.

The boy has shifted position and is now watching the younger children play on the swings in the park. He stares

at them with a shade of sad remembrance in his eyes.

Liz has a different scenario that she chooses to believe. It goes something like this...

Hello. Is your name Michael Fraser?

The boy turns and looks at her as if his saving angel has just lighted on his shoulder.

Yes! Yes, that is my name! he shouts. How did you know?

Liz wastes no time. You were kidnaped from a park near your home in Parksville more than ten years ago - your mother's eye distracted for only a brief and painful moment. Your mother's name is Colleen. Your father is Glen. They've been desperately searching for you for years. They want you home, refusing to consider that you were anything but alive. Only a week ago, they re-broadcast another age enhanced photo of you on the Internet. You look so similar. But your hair is different, browner and shorter. And your face is narrower...But it is you, isn't it? It's you! It's you!

The boy nods vigorously, but carefully - his moistened eyes filled with relief and *fear* as they shift in the direction of the store, from which the man is due to emerge.

I was told my mother had died, he says quietly. And that my real dad didn't love me anymore. He says *he* is my father. I hate him! Do you know what he does?

We haven't time, thinks Liz, afraid to hear what this man does, and wanting to get away before he returns.

Take my hand, come to my car. *Quickly, quickly*, she would say, as she scuttles the boy away. This is your only chance, Michael!

Her heart warms richly at the thought of the reunion of mother, true father and son.

Liz pulls the Kleenex from her purse, and dabs her eyes inconspicuously. Then she looks at the boy again, sitting on the park bench next to her, and wishes for all that she imagined to come true.

The man will be returning soon, but she doesn't want to look foolish. She hesitates, and considers leaving. Then in her mind she sees that photo again, and the agonized faces of the mother and father on the news, and decides to take a chance. She turns to the boy and clears her throat.

You're crazy, Liz.

I know, Gerry. But just this once...

Excuse me, are you Michael?

The boy looks at her, his eyebrows rising in surprise - perhaps at being spoken to by a stranger - then dipping in confusion.

My name is *Jeremy*.

Liz's shoulders sink with disappointment.

Sorry, she says quickly and turns away, feeling an urgency to leave the scene, to allow herself to feel her disappointment in private.

Then the boy speaks again, louder this time.

But ...I think my name used to be Michael Fraser.

Liz raises her chin and turns back to the boy who is staring at her with hope spilling from his widened blue eyes.

A smile larger than life stretches across Liz's face.

Come with me, she says, holding out her hand. There's people who've been waiting a long time to see you.

(Dedicated to a young Michael Wayne Dunahee, still missing from Victoria, B.C., abducted from a school playground in 1991.)

Frozen to Perfection

Vicki Pike

She lay on her back in the snow, savouring the frosty bite of the delicate snowflakes as they fell on her face and the cold and the silence enveloped her. She tried to make a ring from the smoky puffs of her exhaled breath. Dreamily, she moved her arms and legs making an angel in the snow.

She remembered the woman wearing a pink flannelette nightgown with a torn ruffle hanging out under a man's grimy parka, other layers of clothes peeking out above shiny black boots trimmed with matted fur. One hand remained protectively on a grocery cart holding a thin grey blanket in a clear plastic garbage bag, and a red plastic carton for smaller things as the woman searched through the garbage can outside the coffee shop, examining bits of uneaten muffin and dregs of congealed coffee discarded by business people too late for work or too full to finish their meal. She wondered how it would feel to live on a street, no money or home, searching for castoffs and guarding meagre treasures from others who had even less, what daydreams would be about, and she could not imagine it.

She felt a bit guilty knowing that just inside the kitchen door an aromatic beefy stew was simmering on the back burner, and a batch of apple dumplings was warming in the oven. How lucky we are, she thought, to have a cozy home, enough delicious food, and warm clothes to let sprawling out here in the cold be pleasurable.

She loved being outside in the frozen silence, the intense blue of the winter sky covering her like a celestial blanket, daydreams and memories swirling around in her head. She remembered other snow angels, made with laughing young friends, eyelashes sparkling with jewels of melted snow and rosy cheeks and pinched noses, jumping up to throw handfuls of snow at those still on their backs, arms and legs thrashing in the wild abandon of youth, boots squeaking as they ran through the drifts.

She remembered her mother dressed in an old navy snowmobile suit of her father's demonstrating in her own delicate way how to make a perfect ring of angels, large and small holding hands in a circle, and her mother's embarrassed laughter as she scrambled to her feet when a car pulled in the lane to drop off the mail. She promised herself to teach her own daughter how to make one some day.

Suddenly, a door slammed and a voice rang out to her. Mom! When are we going to eat? Stumbling to her feet, she brushed the snow from her as she giggled at being caught out here in the yard, as she thought to herself, just for this one moment, this one frozen minute in time, everything was crystal clear and perfect.

The Champ Penny Gumbert

It was Boxing Day and the games were about to begin. The only spectator was the dog.

Not *that* again, Danny moaned. His Dad had studied Latin and always picked Scrabble. Danny's sister had chosen Po-ke-no. After her last poker game in the dorm Sarah felt she needed a refresher, especially with the threats of impending strip poker sessions. She was considering how soon she could return to school. Mom liked rapid games such as Boggle which she was now holding, along with her lucky pencil. She was wondering if there was enough leftover turkey if Graham stayed for dinner. Danny himself was banking on Stockticker while his friend Graham had a pack of cards and hoped to win some cash. There'd been little snow to shovel so both boys were broke.

Which game would be first? After much arguing the boxes were placed on the floor so the dog could choose. No one saw Danny place a piece of shortbread under the rim of the Stockticker box. The Chihuahua went straight for the game of stocks and bonds and started nibbling at it. Triumphantly the boy retrieved his choice of contest but not before covering the bribe with his foot. The dog snuffled into Danny's instep.

Danny! You should change your socks more often. Look at the dog....ugh! Sarah grimaced.

...Maybe he just loves me. Did ya think of that? Danny was a quick thinker. Come on, give him a treat, you little turnip! Sarah liked admonishing her little brother.

Okay, okay, Dad said, ready to get down to the business of playing. Remember, winner chooses the next game. The stove timer was set for 20 minutes and everyone settled close to the board. At first the trade of stocks and bonds was well planned, even polite. But soon there was frenetic buying and selling. Paper money fell to the floor. Sarah's calculator was snatched from her hands as trades were computed. The banker threw up his hands in resignation. The last roll of the die rattled across the board and came to a stop just as the buzzer sounded. The dog escaped to the kitchen and checked his dish. Yuk, the same old kibble.

Ghad! moaned Sarah. Graham and Danny had made a killing with Industrials and Grain and tied for first place. Paul Newman and Robert Redford in *The Sting* never looked more smug. Now it was the boys' turn to choose. The losers packed up Stockticker, extricating the dice from Dad's clenched fingers.

The next choice was announced, a simple card game called *Thirty-one*, involving a few coins each. It was a fast-paced game, the only interruptions being players rapping frequently and noisily on the table. The dog made fruitless trips to the front door, wondering why no one ever came in. Dad was the first to lose all his money with a penalty double payment. He left the room to show the dog no one had come calling. All was quiet as the next hand went on interminably. Dad returned, holding the dog like a security blanket. Then Mom rapped, Knock, knock! The dog barked. Woof, woof!

Dad glumly tried to repair the Stockticker box with duct tape. The dog ran to the back door and barked. Then she and Dad slipped outside and the little Chihuahua snuffled around the yard, relishing the smells. Dad kicked at frozen things with the toe of his shoe, randomly checking the depth of freezing.

Mom won 31" and graciously went out to the kitchen to fill bowls with snacks and to call to her husband. He headed back to the house as if he were entering a dentist's office. Sensing fresh treats the dog accompanied him. The Boggle box was on the table with papers, pencils and timer. The cover was whipped off with a flourish. Everyone scribbled furiously until Sarah yelled Stop! Time's up! Lists were checked. Mom won more than the

others until Dad had three consecutive lists of 11 words. His victory wasn't that splendid for, truth be told, the youngest players kept their attention on the snacks as much as the rectangle of letter cubes. Mom went out to replenish the bowls. The dog cleaned the floor.

Dad was renewed. He was grinning as he put the lazy Susan onto the dining room table, deposited the Scrabble board on top and distributed the pine letter troughs. He rubbed his hands together, saying
Shall I keep score?

Perhaps we should have some drinks? suggested Mom, as she noticed apathy descending on the table like an eastern fog. When she returned it was her turn to play her tiles. Her word winner ran across the Double word square. Sarah was next and had an S. She was able to get the scores of two words by the strategic use of her S and Z. That almost guaranteed her win but her Dad was stubborn. His turns were lengthy and allowed the others to chat and plan the rest of the day. Graham was going to stay over. Maybe some of them would go to see a movie. The TV news was turned on, and discussed. Sarah checked out the window to see if the promised snow was arriving yet. Mom was able to start the supper preparations in the kitchen. Danny and Graham played Snap. In spite of Dad's efforts the inevitable happened. Sarah won. Like a seal of approval the phone rang out. Victorious, Sarah ran to answer it.

Everyone had been a winner. Now engrossed in her phone conversation it was obvious Sarah had finished playing. Game Day was over. Dad joined Mom in the kitchen. The two boys grinned as they saw snow billowing outside and snowdrifts already forming. They'd rake it in tomorrow.

The dog rooted under the dining room table, cleaning everything up, then padded into the next room. Mom and Dad were nibbling, and sipping wine. They shared their snacks with her. The dog sauntered out to the hall where Sarah was still on the phone. Knowing she'd be gone tomorrow, she broke off most of the cookie she was eating and fed it to the pup, murmuring tenderly. A treasure was found in Danny's room as the dog jumped up onto his bed. A whole bag of corn chips, open.

Dinner! Mom called. The first to arrive was the dog, who stood by her dish and stared up at Mom who couldn't resist adding some turkey leftovers to dog's bowl, a reward for her promptness.

Somehow the Chihuahua managed to empty her bowl. It was dusk and the day was over. But she was satisfied. She was still top dog.

Rebirth

Debora Kirby

The closet was piled high with boxes. As the door swings open, she takes a step back, surveys her task and exhales loudly. Familiar emotions overwhelm her. In an odd way, these feelings are almost comforting. The past week had opened a chasm between what was and what could be as she began to experience the lighthearted, carefree lifestyle she desired. However, deep down she worried that her subconscious would somehow sabotage this newfound happiness. Almost like an addict she craved the feelings that had dominated her life for so long. Is that what drew her to this room, packed full of bittersweet memories, spoiled dreams and disappointments?

It s got to be done sometime, she mumbles as she reaches up and grasps the box perched on the top of the pile. Sitting cross-legged on the floor, she cuts the tape and pulls open the cardboard to expose its contents. Her hand reaches in and comes to rest on a binder. As it emerges from the box, she realizes what she is holding and braces herself for the rush of memories she knows is coming.

She opens the book to reveal a picture of a radiant bride. Spending several minutes looking at the young woman she was, she smiles as she remembers the innocence of the time. Where did you go? she silently asks her image. Slowly, pages turn and photos are examined as she searches for something subtle that seems to be missing in each snapshot. Was it really absent on that day, or is it just that the magic is no longer visible to her? Like almost everything during the past 20 years, the happiness of her wedding day was tempered by an uneasiness that something was not quite right.

A tear falls from her cheek as she looks at the bride and groom standing together following the ceremony that was to join them for life. She wipes the wet spot from the picture and her fingers linger on the face of her husband. His laughter echoes in her mind and she wonders how many years have passed since she last heard that sound. Instead, their lives had become a cacophony of angry exchanges, subtle put-downs and lonely nights in separate rooms.

The frustration and resentment of the past years has recently been replaced by an incredible sadness. There was no physical death, but she recognizes she has entered a period of deep mourning. She closes the book, hugs it to her chest and allows the tears to flow. She cries for the pain that they have caused each other and for all the carelessly used words and actions. Mostly, she cries for the years that they have both lost to anger and unhappiness. But she does not cry for the future.

When her tears are spent, she lays the book back in the box and stands up. This will have to wait for another day! As she turns and walks from the closet she appears to be a different person. Her shoulders no longer droop and her head is held high. The biggest transformation is in her face. The stress and strain of recent events are no longer evident. Her eyes shine and the corners of her mouth seem to naturally curve upward. She stops as she walks by the window and watches the rain fall. This is a beautiful day, she says and celebrates the beginning of her life.

Passage To Freedom!

Norma B. Clare

You placed me on this hurtful pathway! *You*, your cruelty and your repulsive actions! You trampled on me and tormented me,
bruising my body and spirit. You had promised so many things;
I trusted you, and you betrayed me. You shattered my cherished dreams into shrouds that pierced my heart! Hidden in a shadowy painful abyss, I've trudged through the lowest valleys
and climbed the highest mountains in my constant struggle to survive.

In your eyes I am weak and worthless. You destroyed me, or so you think. But that was then, and this is now. With the passage of time,
I've begun to feel subtle changes within as I make exciting discoveries about myself. Sometimes I think I see light at the end of the tunnel;
I even dare to hope that one day I will completely escape from your snare.

Daily I try to stand up for my rights and meet life's challenges head on. Why am I determined now?
Because your wickedness
makes me want to change who I am. So I'm becoming strong, and in the future will be stronger than ever before.
In my quest for peace, I refuse to allow you to ridicule me,
to destroy me. No longer will I allow you to drag me down
into those loathsome depths.

You have *not* won! For hidden very deep inside is the real me; this fact gives me hope to carry on. At times my mirror reflects a cocoon
of uncertainty and loneliness; but I will emerge as a beautiful butterfly - one day. Gentle breezes will lift me up to soar on eagles' wings;
twinkling starlight will lead me on to a golden dawn!

The momentum is building, and I will burst these shackles that bind me. No obstacle can deter me; absolutely nothing will hold me back!
I am filling my life with positivity, striving to embrace all that is good in me. These are incredible moments;
I simply quiver inside with the sheer excitement of it all!

Naturally my task is difficult; definitely I have doubts and fears.
I'm aware the roads ahead will be rocky and the journey long. But I'll take slow baby steps, living one day at a time.
Or maybe one hour. Perhaps only a single minute.
I can win this battle. I can do it; I *will* do it. I must!
And my reward will last a lifetime.

I stumble; I fall. But again and again I rise up, braver each time.
The chains gradually loosen, as I toss out my past and fling it over an imaginary cliff. I will conquer this beast;
and out of its sad, grey ashes will arise the person I was meant to be!
I'm presently learning to love who I am; truly. I do have much to offer!
Secretly, I even desire to leave my footprints in the book of life!

I m profoundly grateful for my new-found courage. I am ecstatic! I want to dance and spin in endless circles of wonder! A wordless song vibrates in my soul, its melody joyful, uplifting! Gently the lyrics stir, then boldly are born, guiding me in a magical direction. From the highest hill top I proclaim this glorious song, my own ballad of empowerment! Today I walk proudly, my head held high. I celebrate *me*- all that I am and all I will be in years to come.

My life has just begun! I am free at last - at *last!* *Free* to be *me!*

I Rise UP Singing

Sheila Aguiar

With joy, a feeling of fulfillment I graduate and start on my career
Anxiously await the day I will fall in love and get married
This too I have successfully achieved So I think
Then time changes circumstances
Everything falls apart, My career my life and even my love
Slowly but surely, At last I am treated as an inferior object, scorned,
Made use of, taunted bashed and bruised
My children witness the violence and humiliation
I am shackled with shame and guilt and acceptance of my fate
This sordid secret overshadows my past glories
My voice is silenced, my identity lost.
Then suddenly one day, Boom! The balloon of frustration inside me explodes.
I cry out for deliverance and empowerment.
When I have truth and faith why do I tolerate this injustice.
I will step out extricate myself from these binding chains
No more will I perceive myself as an inferior, But diligently and with hard work
Will and must evolve into an Intelligent, active super human being.
Once I have crossed the threshold there is no turning back.
This is the beginning of a long journey. Discovering myself
My physical, emotional and spiritual needs I will tenderly nourish,
I am propelled by a motivating force on my journey of change
Filled with courage and determination I will relentlessly pursue
The beacon of hope.
I now join groups, give testimony, share my fate with others
Midst empathy love and encouragement., so effective and spectacular
No more tears of frustration from brutality, but laughter and joy.
This gives me independence and support to step out
Become visible, and heard in society
Gradually transform my self-perception. Be an inspiration to others
To work relentlessly in a concerted effort
In our struggle to transform the world into a better place to live in
Dream the dream every woman dreams A world of Justice and Love
Success depends on my conviction and drive
Through self effort, perseverance and the power from above
I will say to myself I am brave I have value. and. I am special

I will and must evolve into a woman of substance.
And then someday (soon) I shall arrive with others at journey's end
Life bursts out in a frenzy of colours, We dance our spirit in joy
And fly on the wings of a dove Higher and Higher
We will in a chorus rise up singing

Woman of Beauty, Woman of Truth

Terry Ann Carter

2nd Prize

- 1 the woman in turquoise
 riding on the bus
 beside me lifts a finger
 to her eyebrow smoothes
 the wide arc like a seagull
 floating downwind and checks
 her compact angling the mirror
 toward her face
 as if this were
 the only moment in the world
 and it belonged to her
- 2 the woman closes
 her compact with a little puff
 of air settles in the seat
 next to me closes her eyes
 and rests her head
 against the half open window
 spring air rifling
 the strands around her eyes
 sun glitters on her face
- 3 in a dream
 the woman in turquoise
 riding on the bus beside me
 holds out her arms
 to a lost child
 speaking a word
 that proclaims such tenderness
 a delicacy of petals
 against her throat
 she calls the child grace

4 the woman on the bus
beside me
is wearing turquoise
and carrying a small child
along with wild roses
and raspberries
in a brown paper bag
the woman opens her mirror
so the child may watch sunlight
dance on crimson lips

5 outside the bus window
linden trees rush by
their green velvet
secure against the clouds

Stories in the Bum

Nairne Holtz

3rd Prize

There are some stories you can never tell. Stories sealed in an amniotic sac, they must be held in place. They are so disgusting. You are so disgusting. You used to play Doctor in the Bum with your sister. You looked at each other's bums, took each other's temperature with spoons and rubbed against each other, dry sticks sparking fire. In you. In her. She cancelled the game. As an adult, she can't remember. She doesn't want to / you. She doesn't want you to.

My father looked up my sister's bum at night. This is not a recovered memory, it really happened. And it's not what you think. He was checking for worms. The doctor told him to. She said that's why our stomachs hurt, why our shit looked like it was full of rice. Dirty hippies, her white uniform admonished us. My father tore his nose from my sister's crack. Eureka, he had spotted one! It confirmed what I already know: there was something disgusting inside me.

There are some stories you can tell just by looking. Girls who are fucked up and will fuck have it written on their bodies. You just have to look in the right place to find out why. A family photo album, for example. The golden kid standing in the river, sun shooting all over the water. Outside the frame in an ungainly sprawl of pasty arms, the dark kid blubbers because she's not allowed to be in the picture. A memory she'd rather slide away, but it too, is preserved in the album, another Kodak moment.

I asked my father if he'd ever been in love with anyone besides my mother. He said, I don't know if I was in love with your Mom. The closest I've ever been to being in love was when your sister was born. I could not stop thinking about her, feeling this joy.

There are some stories you keep a lid on. You are the only one who knows your sister was molested by the family doctor. A woman. You read about female perps in a psych journal: less frequent, less violent, less overtly sexual. It fits. This is not a memory excavated by a therapist. Your sister always knew, she just allowed the experience to crawl away somewhere, the ledge of her mind, up her bum maybe? Does it matter? She blew it out.

When I was grabbed from behind, held down and raped, my first thought was, I guess it's my turn. Telling about being raped feels like a bid for pity, and I want to scratch that out of your eyes. Telling isn't allowed in a story; show the details, let the reader swim into the narrative, i.e., the carpet burned my ass while he used my cunt like a Kleenex. Was that a good metaphor? Did it get your attention? Too bad I'm lying like a girl. Why do you need to jerk off to the details? It would be easier if it had happened to you. Then I wouldn't have to talk about it. Maybe the reason why every woman I've ever fucked has been a survivor isn't that deep. Tell me something I don't know.

When people on talk shows display their flames of scars for fifteen minutes of fame, a tabloid moment really, do you think those stories are real? Do you think Guns n' Roses lead singer Axyl Rose was telling the truth about his step-father raping him when he was a baby? Do you think he just appropriated the stories of rape victims to suck up some attention? Do you blame him or his flaky therapist, a woman? Do you think the stories are real but these losers should just cool their jets, keep their skid streaked underwear on and quit blaming their failures on their parents?

My mother's legs were looped like fresh pasta as she channelled the voice of Winston Churchill. My mother was the wheel around which the family churned, and we believed her. But it was another story I never told. I knew conducting the dead like electricity wasn't normal, I knew it could reflect badly on me. I never knew the anger she poured over me, into me like a Jell-O mould wasn't normal, would

reflect badly on me. Why was she so angry? Hers was the only astrological chart in the family to promise fame and success but channelling was the closest she got to her destiny.

There are some girls you can't make into stories because they, you are too pathetic. The story is only one line anyway, and Black Flag already made it into a song, Too Drunk to Fuck. Booze, coke and weed hum through your skin but desire is set of drums pounding the loudest: you want to fuck the girl everyone says is bad news. You're an empty page because you just shed a boyfriend, and no one in the dyke community knows you. There are no stories about you even after you fuck the dangerous girl. She can't write properly, and no one believes a word she says, so who is there to tell about the time she grabbed you from behind and tried to pretend you were a virgin? Who is there to tell on you when you slapped her because you didn't know what the fuck she was doing, no one was

going to get you from behind again, you wanted to fuck and she wanted to play a game. You hit her and nothing like surprise flared in her eyes so you stopped. Eventually the two of you fucked, it was kind of sweet, had the promise of heat but it only happened once although it kept almost happening. Six months later she bleated out her story: I gave you a lot of mixed messages see, because I was going to a therapist. My ex said I should because of the way I treated her. The therapist let me pay whatever I got, that was cool but the more I talked about my stepfather raping me, the more I couldn't handle it so I started getting into coke. Then I decided it was better to quit therapy than to start banging coke again.

Her story's kind of familiar, don't you think? The kind of story we're all so over.

I had a teacher I really liked. On the first day of class, he asked, what is freedom? and my head exploded with thought. Later in the school year, he asked the class to debate whether a topless dancer was raped when she accepted a ride home with a patron of the club who forced her to have sex. This was 1980 something. I'm sure it wouldn't happen today. He'd probably bring up a more progressive topic, like whether false memory syndrome exists. Anyway, my teacher complained to my father who was a friend of his that I had a meltdown in the class. My father and mother freaked on me. See my family wanted me to get over the rape already; the cops didn't believe me until I passed their lie detector test, and then they pressured me to drop the charges because they said it would ruin my life. After that, what was the point of telling anyone? I shut up about it for a long time and fucked a lot of guys I didn't want.

Every girl has a shitty story you're not supposed to tell, but you do, I do.

Remembering Her

Jenny Keene

2nd Prize

Her bones must have been as delicate as a young bird's. She was so tiny. It makes me want to cry to think of her.

We were all so frightened then. Each of us hanging on...barely...to mere threads of sanity. I had never known a place like this before. Every face, each pair of eyes, had blinds pulled down. You don't see out and no one can really see in. It was a time of inner torment, and of healing.

She came with her baby: a little girl. The wee-one clung to her mother obsessively, for survival, and only rarely glanced at us with wary eyes.

We went through motions then: wake up, cry silently, wash, do some chores, sit, stare, rock yourself in a corner, hold your children, pace, sit. Sometimes gifts came in: used clothing, tea-cups, odd bits and pieces. What treasures they were! We had nothing, nothing, and less than nothing. Someone out there was Angel-inspired and brought us boxes and boxes of brand-new shoes and boots. This felt like a miracle. We would rummage through these precious gifts, taking what we needed. Some people were greedy, but most were not.

She sat in the corner with her child. She did not look through the bags with us. She simply sat, shades pulled down. We found some baby dresses and hats and we showed them to her. She shook her head. Two of us tried again: displaying the treasures and pointing to her child. She seemed surprised. Did we mean that she could have them? Yes. A brief spark of light escaped the shades -- both given and received.

All of us had arrived there by our own strong legs. I had made it by running, barefoot in the snow, clad in my nightgown. Rumour had it -- she was found -- in a hallway with her child. That was worse.

It was a house we were in...a big huge house that never had time to become a home -- so much pain coming in through the doors all the time, day and night.

We took turns doing different chores. It was good to go through the motions. She gestured that she would cook something that night. I watched her put uncooked rice in a pan and fry it, later adding all kinds of good things to it. It was a dish from her homeland, wherever that was. Maybe Thailand, I don't know. She didn't speak any English and she was very shy.

The table was set and the others came into the room, everyone, so many of us. People started to serve their children and to eat. I looked up from where I sat and I saw her, standing against the wall, off a little ways. Somewhere in her eyes, her gentleness and her loneliness spoke to me. Whether it was from her culture or her shyness or both, I just knew that she expected that she would eat when we were through...as though she thought that she was not allowed to eat until the others had finished.

It made me want to cry. She was one of us -- part of us -- but she didn't know. We had to coax her to the table. Each of us helped, gesturing and getting things: a highchair, bib, plates, and making room for her and her baby...until she could not help but understand that she was welcome with us, here at the shelter.

Confessions From Suburbia

Jennifer Bredl

1st prize

i was breaking down for years but didn't know it - i was suffering from unresolved issues around my own addictions and four babies worth of post partum depression - i ended up in the psychiatric ward of our local hospital - of course, by the time i ended up in the hospital - i was worn out - mentally and physically - i quite literally wanted to die -

once in the hospital - they asked me twenty questions to decide if i was really depressed or not - one of the questions was - do you have a gun at home? - i answered no - but if i did - i would have used it by now -

I keep having this recurring memory.

What kind of memory? The doctor's voice is low and cool. Inviting.

I pause, my mind heavy with thought, as I sort out fact from fiction, what to keep inside, what to share.

It's like everything in my life. It just keeps recurring. Kinda like a nightmare. It's like every time I know, know, a bad dream that I have over and over. It's always the same known time. It always gives me the same horror when I wake up.

The doctor leans forward. Horror?

It's like waking up. It's like waking up dope sick. I come to, really sudden, like someone has pushed me off the bed. bed, it's wet from gallons of sweat dripping off my body.

I feel moisture gather in my armpits at the thought of it.

There's always dope in the dream and a red light or sometimes a white light. And stairs. Crazy, steep, dark stairs. And that's where the light is. At the top of the stairs. Except, in my dream, somehow it's not only a light. It's the presence of sheer evil, beckoning me. I hate that fucking dream.

I look down at my hands. I'm picking my nails. Always picking. Tearing little pieces of myself away, dropping bits of myself here and there.

So this is memory?

No, that's just the dream I have. No, the memory I have is something else. It's more like a constant reminder of death or something. I'm not sure. It's hard to describe.

I don't really follow you. Could you be more specific?

Well, it's like a colour or a smell. You know. I'm sure you must know. Like when you smell something or see something, or even taste something, it can remind you of something else. Another time, another place. Maybe even another feeling.

You're being too ambiguous. Can you get to the point of the memory - Where it's coming from, perhaps?

Well, that's the problem. I can't seem to get to the point. I don't know what the point is except I keep having this recurring memory.

And when exactly do you get this memory? The Doctor taps her pen on her desk to get to the point herself.

Well, I seem to get it in the morning, just before I drift off to sleep, and sometimes I get it during day. Funny, I guess I get it any time. Do you think it could be the medication?

Hmm, well, that is a possibility, but somehow I doubt it. Doctor Silver writes furiously in her made-for-notes notepad. The one attached to my file. Tell me more.

Well, in this memory, I am on the lam.

What exactly do you mean by on the lam?

You know. I've run away from home.

Run away?

Yeah, I'm running along a winding trail through the forest. My destination? The Coquitlam River. I'm running to the river because there is nowhere else to go. Nowhere to run too bay-bee, nowhere to hide. That's the song I'm singing while I'm running. I always hear that song. That's my song. Even now, it's in my head.

Okay, so tell me why you're running.

Well, because I don't know what to do. I mean, with my life that is. I'm trapped in an intolerable situation and I want to escape.

Escape? You mean physically? What about mentally?

Sure, always mentally. I always want to escape mentally. I close my eyes.

Okay. Continue.

I want to escape and the river is the only place I can think of to go to. Have you ever walked through the woods toward a river or a creek?

Mmm, yes I think so.

Well, if you ever have, you'll know what I'm talking about. It's a very subtle experience. As I close in on the invisible river, I can hear it getting louder and louder, until finally, it absorbs me completely. Its roar blocks out every other sound. Auditory deprivation. Gone are the birds chirping, gone are the sounds of my feet as they hit the ground. The river consumes me before I ever see it. I'm alone in the forest.

I trace the outline of the dark grey tile on the floor with the toe of my paper slipper. I can completely

visualize myself running along.

Describe it to me.

Sunlight trickles through the tops of trees lighting up my head and face as I run, but it doesn't give me any comfort and it's not warm. It doesn't make me happy. Somehow, it just makes me feel sadder.

Why do you suppose that is?

I'm not sure. It's as if I'm moving through a dream. Nothing feels real. I'm breaking down. I can still remember the smell of the forest that day. Mildew, damp, green. The rot of a lower mainland winter. Early spring forest. I keep running until I come to the water edge. It smells like mud. The river is high. It's a vortex of movement. The water tears away at the banks, moving rocks and leaving holes, bearing the roots of trees. It sucks away everything in its path. I want to fall in. End it all here and now, because, I'm not worthy to live.

Why are you not worthy to live?

Why? Because my life is a dismal failure. I'm nothing. I am completely unlovable.

Do you still see yourself as completely unlovable? I mean right now? Right here as we sit?

No, I don't think so. Not now.

Oh good. Then we have made some progress. The Doctor's pen scratches hastily across her notepad. She looks over her glasses at me. Continue, she commands. You were standing at the river.

Yeah - I was standing at the fucking river. - I remember thinking no one knows how big this pain inside of me is. I felt completely alone. I decided to jump into the river. I could see myself going down it, tumbling, rolling, arms and legs flailing. The current pulling me under - sucking away my last breath. I am drowning. I am Ophelia. - Romantic, eh?

Do you think it's romantic?

Well, not really. But I can remember thinking that the river was calling me. Thinking no one will miss me. The children may wonder where I've gone, but it doesn't matter. Poor, miserable little things.

Why do you say that?

Because, I thought it would be sad for them to lose their mother. You know. And then all of a sudden the enormity of it all hit me. I realized - I can't abandon them. I decided to go and get them. Bring them to the river. To save them. I stood there imagining my children floating down the river. One at a time, into the water. No fear. Just relief. I will save them and end my suffering.

The room is quiet except for the tic-tic of the doctor's watch. My nail is bleeding. I put my finger to my mouth and taste salt blood on my tongue.

So, what you are saying is, that you wanted to kill your children too?

Yes, I wanted to kill my children.

So what did you do next?

I m not sure. I think I lit a cigarette. I think I sat on a rock and smoked. One cigarette after another. Yes, I m sure of it. I sat there. I cried and I smoked. I smoked away the pain. I returned to common sense. I smoked some more. I realized it was not the day to die. And then I walked home. Slowly.

welfare isn t fare

Kathleen Abley

3rd Prize

forty something and i wait
for an interview at the welfare
shamed naked
even in my best clothes
anxiety is a tight fit
i m ready to confess
my guilt
to anything

this place smells like acetone
maybe that s it
all applicants are a photo copy of the last one
that s why the interviewer doesn t look at me
he doesn t have to
i look just like all the others
seen today

i want to say
i was married once
to a young man
filled with hope
that split
to turn sour
like his breath
the last of the weekend dregs

i want to say
i have a lovely son
i ve worked hard
i m a good person
how can i converse with the top of a head
a bald spot
vacant and unseeing as a false eye

on the desk is a file an inch thick
what have i done to fill such a file
i m a small woman
with a small life

what is he writing
i haven t said anything
maybe he can read my mind
maybe not

Posing for Picasso

Wendy Lycett

1st Prize

My friend, it has been too long,
you must come visit, soon.
There is a bottle of Merlot waiting
on the pantry shelf.
I ll call you, soon, I promise,
as soon as I can get caught up on things.
Things. Strange how they pile up, possessions
and intentions. Assumed obligations.
Remember when we had no things, just faith?
When did it all get to be so much?

I have been meaning to plant bulbs for spring,
trim the cedars, turn the compost..paint
the front hall. Every morning I start a new poem,
and all day long the words just keep getting
tangled up. At night I fall asleep trying
to unravel the snarled strings of thought.

Last night I dreamt I was laid bare
upon a platter, posing for Picasso, like a feast.
So much ripe Mediterranean fruit...pomegranate breasts,
perfect pear thighs; melons and grapes
tossed in here and there -- spare parts.
Pablo painted with a silver fork, dipping the tines
into egg yokes and wine, wiping the ochre and burgundy
across the canvas in slow hypnotic circles.
You ve been served better fare than this, I mouthed,
from ruby lips pasted on my belly. I boldly winked
the Prussian blue eye perched haphazardly
on my chin. This is your hunger, not mine,
he replied as he bit my plum cheek and disappeared.

My friend, you must come to visit soon.
How about dinner -- Tuesday?

My Different Life

Julie Domenico

Trees are the best place in the world for us canaries. There is nothing to fear when you are in a tree - there is no darkness in a tree. Strong wood and sweet greenness shelter you, and even raindrops cannot manage the complicated path to your shelter. As long as your feet are on a branch, you know that you can never be sad. The sun will always burn off the clouds.

If you are patient.

If you aren't allowed to have a tree, a cage is sometimes tolerable. Cages are best if you never knew about trees. If you struggled free of your shell and the first thing you saw was a cage, then you never knew about the wonders of trees. You will be all right. You will think you are happy and share your canary songs with the world, and what you never had the chance to know cannot touch you. There will be no pictures in your head of green folding over you, or of sky that is wide in its blueness. Velvet night will never pour over you with its wet scent and its punctures that are stars. No moon will revise your song with its growing and ungrowing. You will not know.

You will be happy to see the world through the thin bars of your cage.

I knew a tree once, but after the nets swept me in, I never saw it again. The leaves cried for me and the sap ran dry in its search for a new song, but I never saw my tree again. I came to know what a cage means, and how when you cannot fly with your wings you can at least fly with your mind. When you forget about all the things that were ordinary life, you can begin to live your different life.

My different life started in a cage, a very big cage. There were lots and lots of others of my kind. We looked at each other, and none of us sang. We preened our feathers, repairing the tears from the nets, found water in small containers, and learned what it was like to live without green.

Every morning when the light squeezed back into The Big Cage, they would come for us. One at a time, each dirt-scarred hand would reach into our cage and select one of us. We didn't try to resist; our songs were already gone. Each time a hand took me, it placed me in a very small

cage, one so narrow my wings could not be spread. With no perch inside, I was jostled about in a sea of nausea as my cage bumped along.

A black hand would carry my cage into ever deepening darkness. Through the screen over the hole in the side, I could see other silent canaries being carried along in their small cages. After a while our cages would stop bumping, and the grating noises of machinery would fill our heads as we dropped down and down in our tiny cages.

Here the darkness was thick, cut only by meager beams of fluttering light. The plunge into darkness was always followed by more jostling, as our cages passed endless rock walls split here and there by the chalky flatness of coal seams. When the journey ended my cage would be hung on a peg or at times just set on the ground. I would sit there drawing in my sentinel breath as the owners of the cages did their labour.

After a period of time, the journey would begin again, but in reverse, and we would travel up to the light. If the sun had not already set.

We would be placed back in The Big Cage to await the repeat of the cycle when daylight returned. In the

darkness, one of us might begin to sing - a new song, a different song. Sweet notes would glide through the dark cloaks each of us wore. Voices would join in, but we were careful to finish our offerings before daylight.

In the songless hours that followed, we would dream of our trees waiting for us in the melting twilight.

Bar Code
Bev Greenberg

My boyfriend spends his time making works of art while I'm at work taking care of other people's children. I sit in the parking lot of our building on a Saturday afternoon, ready to punch his face in. My tire is flat, and he's the one who last used my car.

When I bang on the door of our apartment, he is so engrossed in his project that he doesn't even hear me at first. It's three o'clock in the afternoon, but he's still in his underwear. When he finally answers the door, his face has a snarky expression because of my interrupting him. He's been pasting up a huge canvas of banana skin paper with bar codes to form some sort of design. It's supposed to say something about pop culture, but I can't for the life of me remember what. To get his attention, I blow the whistle at the end of my key chain.

What's up? he asks, barely looking up.

I mention about the car and he rolls his eyes, but I manage to coax him to get dressed, then drag him down to the parking lot. I watch him change the tire so effortlessly, and wonder if he's wasting his life. Then as the car pulls away, he just stands there, waving goodbye like nothing happened. That makes me feel like leaving a message on his email saying I don't want to see him any more.

It wasn't always like this. Six months ago, he claimed that the muse called him, or as he puts it, she tapped him on the shoulder and wouldn't let him go. Everything came to him suddenly in a dream and the same morning, he announced that he was going to follow his passion.

What does that mean? I asked, emptying the dishwasher.

He said he kept hearing a voice that told him to quit his job selling real estate and work full time at his art.

I'll never forgive myself if I don't at least try, he added, pulling his ponytail tighter.

Are you crazy? Who do you expect to support you? I already knew the answer.

He threw me a glare, said nothing and just stared. He didn't have to say anything more; the implication was more than clear.

There is nothing tangible holding me here, so why can't I leave? I am stuck like one of those insects living on the back of an elephant. I think he must be going through some sort of mid life crisis, but he's in denial about it. He just needs a break, he says. Come to think of it, so do I.

Lately, I think a lot about leaving, especially when I'm setting up all the daycare equipment just before the kids come trooping in. How did he ever get from that point to here? In a way, he may be getting back to his own childhood.

Yesterday, I came home to find the bar code art almost finished. He has it on display in the living room, and he has manipulated the shapes in such a way that the canvas actually resembles a reclining nude. That's O.K., but I object to the nude in his bed.

I want to blurt out, What are you doing - practicing? But I slip out slowly before they're even aware of my presence. Later that night, he remarks several times about how tired he is. I think to myself, no wonder.

I wake up in the middle of the night with him on his back beside me. I watch the gentle rise and fall of his chest as he breathes deeply. His penis looks so innocent - like an animal resting benignly - which gives me an idea.

My bags are finally packed and they sit in the hallway by the door. I think of writing a note, but change my mind. Instead I head for the kitchen, rifle through the spice cupboard above the stove till I spy the tabasco sauce. Two or three drops is all it takes. In less than a minute, he has bolted straight upright and is holding his groin and screaming.

I don't wait to confront him. I head downstairs to the car, drive as far away as I can, and find a room in a motel ten minutes from the day care center. It's still dark out, so I take a two hour nap. At day break, I rise up singing and get ready for work. Later on, the moms all comment about how radiant I look when they come to pick up their kids that afternoon. I simply smile, briefly mentioning that my life has changed.

Woman in Fear

Irene Livingston

Where do you go when the storm
batters your fragile shutters? Where do you run
when the killing wind howls around
your tender eaves? Where do you turn
when the hard sleet hammers the tin
skin of your walls? Do you run
into the desolate street? No. You hide

in the blind corners of your mind. Your roots
have grown down into cracks
in the floor, entangled themselves with the thin,
frayed curtains, wound around the solid
door handles. How can you leave? The roots
will break and bleed if you try. Tomorrow
the furious torrents will cease for a time. You pull

your chicks under your wounded wings,
shush-shush their fearful sobbings. Once more
you will wait out the storm while the roots
grow stronger and the children cry in the night.

Beyond the walls, a warm sun waits
to bless and caress your head, to softly
dissolve old misshapen roots. Find

your heroic anger. Turn and face your dread
of The Door. Face it and strangle it.
You have within you the power of ancient Gaia,
Goddess of Earth, born of Chaos. Evoke

your will of iron, hidden in the cell-deep
wells of your body. Take your shears of steel, cut
the fleshy roots that twine around and bind
you to the brass handles, and see that the door
has been open all the time. Close

your ears to the crying rivers of fear,
and with your precious chicks under your wings,
wade past the threatening shoals,
You only have to do it once.
And flee, flee to the waiting arms of the sun.

Bosoms

Sadiqa Khan

One thing that had survived the generational tumble from the robust, cream-skinned old woman to her dark and wiry granddaughter was the fascination with disaster. Fires were their favourite. Watching reports of them on the evening news was interesting enough, but truly riveting were those rare blazes that took place in the city itself. The grandmother's residence seemed contrived to suit their needs. It was an apartment on the thirteenth floor of a fourteen story building, the tallest structure after some far off smokestacks. There were windows on three sides, two in the living room and one in the kitchen. It had not taken the grandmother long after moving into the flat to purchase a pair of binoculars and take advantage of the espionage potential that her new home held. Her granddaughter had never known it any other way. After years of vacations at her grandmother's apartment, the comings and goings of certain neighbourhood residents were as familiar to her as her own routines of school and home. But this afternoon, the usual players in the streets and parks around the apartment were overshadowed by the event taking place slightly outside the usual range of observation. There, in the treeless red brick neighbourhood that bordered the industrial terrain, something was on fire.

The granddaughter had sighted the smoke minutes earlier. Now she was kneeling on a chair, elbows on the living room table, peering out the window with the heavy black binoculars pressed against her face. At times like this, the grandmother possessed an admirable sense of priority, and did not remark on the way the girl was shifting the thick tapestry that covered the table onto the floor. The granddaughter called the old woman Oma, and she called the girl Marieke. Marieke, she said. What do you see?

I see flames in the roof. I can't see any people.

Soon there was a fire truck barreling down the main road, lights and sirens breaking the quiet hour. Marieke followed it with the binoculars, nearly plummeting off the chair as she moved with the vehicle below. There's someone standing on the back, she said. It was the only detail she could think of adding to the image of the loud, bright fire engine, which was visible enough without the binoculars. They lost sight of the truck when it turned into the street with the burning building. It appeared

intermittently between the houses, and when it stopped a small portion

remained in view. Then nothing happened.

Why don't you get the pastries out of the fridge, and I'll pour the coffee, suggested Oma. They both liked to accompany these incidents with suitable rituals of indulgence. Not that they were unconcerned about the suffering that the fire would create. It was just that such a break from the ordinary seemed to demand observances similar to those otherwise reserved for birthdays or guests. The pastries had in fact been purchased for one of the grandmother's friends who was to come by the following day, but the occasion of the fire preempted her visit.

Marieke had bought the pastries that morning at the bakery nearby. They were her grandmother's favourite, and she had always heard them referred to as bosoms. The origin of that peculiar name became embarrassingly clear as soon as one saw the small cakes in question. They were made of mocha meringue, and topped with three rounded peaks that each held a hazelnut in nipple-like protrusion. The fact that there were three peaks did not diminish the anatomical resemblance. Marieke had some trouble communicating her order at the bakery where she discovered in slow, blushing increments that bosom was the family's private name for the pastries and they were actually called hazelnut mocha meringues. Back in the apartment, however, they were bosoms without question and Marieke was carefully placing two of them on saucers. Oma poured the girl's coffee, stirring in half a cup of milk and two heaping

spoons of sugar.

They reinstalled themselves at the table. Marieke had the binoculars up again.

The smoke had become whiter, almost opaque. I think I see water spraying. Marieke reported. She handed the binoculars to Oma.

Yes, the old woman said, I see it. It should be out soon, thank goodness. Those poor people. They might have lost everything. Marieke held her breath, trying to summon the feelings that she thought should accompany such circumstances.

They ate their meringue bosoms slowly, keeping their eyes on the smouldering rooftop in the distance. I think they should make them bigger, Marieke mused. Deep within the grandmother's own bosom, dormant cells were stirring. Infinitesimal mechanisms were telling them

to grow. And nothing gave them away.

The fire was in the newspaper on the following morning. The young girl and the old woman pored over the article and the accompanying photograph. You can't see anything there, Marieke complained. The picture had printed darkly, as if the charred subject had somehow smudged the page. Oma started reading the last paragraph out loud. The remains of the house were to be demolished that day.

I want to see it! Marieke said.

You may, said Oma. but first we have Mrs. Dorst coming over, and you ought to be here. She adores you.

Mrs. Dorst arrived shortly after lunch. Marieke helped her grandmother serve coffee and sugar cookies. The three of them sat down in the regal arm chairs that surrounded the coffee table. It was not apparent to Marieke that Mrs. Dorst adored her. The woman offered only a limp smile and then turned to Oma and started talking about her arthritis and her children who did not come over frequently enough. She continued for one hour and fifty-three minutes. The grandmother countered occasionally with attempts to balance the gloom of her companion. Marieke kept time on the grand wooden clock. At first she thought she could discipline her boredom just by staring at the minute hand and watching it move with its small, inaudible clicks. But after eight minutes she decided that the situation called for more powerful measures. Marieke pretended that she was tied to the chair she was in. Oma and Mrs. Dorst were her captors, who had caught her spying for the Russians from the window. They had seen from below her binoculars shimmer in the sunlight for an instant, and broken into the apartment to take her prisoner. Now, they were waiting for orders from their superiors, passing the time with idle conversation. Marieke was grim and silent, fortified for a potential interrogation, and determined to reveal nothing. Oma and Mrs. Dorst were oblivious to her game, pausing only momentarily at the vehemence with which she refused the second round of coffee and cookies.

At last, Mrs. Dorst rose and struggled into her coat. Marieke, can you walk Mrs. Dorst to her apartment? Oma asked.

Sure, said Marieke. But then I'm going to the house.

That's fine, Oma replied. And thank you for being so patient. Be careful. Stay on the right side of the street.

Marieke took the elevator to the third floor, where Mrs. Dorst lived. Then she took the stairs down to the

ground floor, and outside the building she unlocked the bicycle that they kept at Oma's place.

The bike had belonged to one of grandmother's friends, but it was only slightly tall for Marieke. She swayed at first, adjusting to the unfamiliar weight of the frame. Then she picked up speed. Transcribing the view from the flat to the roads and buildings that had returned to earnest scale, Marieke determined her route. From the apartment, Oma was watching her granddaughter move like quicksilver down the street.

The thing about rubble, Marieke saw as her anticipation deflated, is that the house in ruins is so foreign. She had thought there would be pieces of furniture, a section of staircase maybe, kitchenware. Her eyes searched the pile of bricks for something small and meaningful, some object that would reveal even a thread of narrative. But she couldn't find anything among the blackened pipes and blocks that so unexpectedly dominated. Bricks, metal, rising shreds of ash. She felt a hollow ache in her chest. There was nothing to report, no striking details to race back to the apartment with, where Oma was waiting. A man in singed overalls told Marieke to move on. She hesitated. This story that there was no story, that there were no expressive fragments resting in the debris, this seemed to Marieke an unacceptable outcome. She leaned forward on the handlebars of her bike, tipping from one foot to the other. There was no other choice she thought, and started constructing the fiction that she would take home.

Untitled
Veronica Yu

It was the third week of April 1998 and the weather was dry and warm in Flagstaff, Arizona. Around 6:40 a.m. heavy snow started falling as I passed the 8900 ft. elevation sign at the end of a magnificent sheer rock drop. I thought nothing of the snow. After all, I grew up in Canada and was familiar with winter driving. I slowed down to 40 km/hr, flipped on my wipers and pushed on.

On a straight stretch of highway bordered by ponderosa pine, a lone cube van travelled towards me. All of a sudden, my car slid off the road into the right ditch. In my periphery, I saw the van simultaneously slide off to their right. I turned the steering wheel as quickly to the left as far as it could go but couldn't avoid the fence. When I realized I wasn't going to be able to avoid the trees, I closed my eyes tight, pressed my neck against the headrest and braced for the inevitable impact. Instantaneously, my thoughts connected with all the people who've been in similar circumstances and felt graphically how frightening it was to experience this fearful and silent piece of time alone.

My eyes bolted open as the car swung left with such vigor my hands were torn off the steering wheel as my body lurched to the right. I regained control of the wheel but it took me a few seconds to realize that I had missed the trees somehow and the car had jumped out of the ditch and was crossing the two lanes of highway heading for the ditch on the other side. My brakes were still not working. I wondered where the van was and if I was going to hit it. My car went over the shoulder and down the other side. This time, I kept my eyes open. The car spun around and came out of the ditch, came to an abrupt stop and stalled across both lanes of the snow-covered highway. Suddenly, I became acutely aware that I was absolutely freezing. I started to hyperventilate and shake. I was going into shock. I put my head on my knees and forced myself to breathe slower.

When I looked up, the windows and windshield were snow covered. I was driving a white Nissan Altima. When I realized that I could be hit in either or both directions, my body tightened up from fear of impact. The car would not restart. I forced the shift back into neutral and tried a couple more times. The engine finally caught. I switched on the heat, the wipers and the defrost. When I saw that no other vehicles were around,

I started to cry. I thought of my dad. I wanted him to rescue me. I grabbed the cell phone but didn't know whom to call. I was too scared to keep driving into higher elevation. I wasn't looking forward to driving back down since the prior stretch of road had a sheer drop without any barriers. The decision to drive back down eventually won out. There were no signs of the van nor were there any tire markings.

I shifted into first gear and drove on the wrong side of the road as close to the rock face as I could, in order to put as much distance away from the sheer drop as possible. It wasn't until I had passed the last sheer drop passage that I finally began to breathe deeply and thankfully. When I reached Flagstaff, I called the weather office at the canyon to find out when the snow was expected to stop. I was speechless when they informed me that they didn't have any snow there at all and that a couple of tour buses that had traversed the same route as I had taken earlier had just pulled in and weren't even wet. I hung up, barely able to say goodbye.

When I remembered the damaged rental car, a headache started to come on as I had no idea how complicated the insurance process would be. I worriedly went out to check the car. I circled it twice to make sure my glasses were on properly because I couldn't find a scratch. I was in disbelief. What type

of trick was the universe playing on me? I felt nauseous. I didn't know whether to throw up from the expulsion of stress or burst from joy.

I suddenly realized that my conviction was being tested. I wasn't scared anymore. I knew I had to get to the canyon and finish my hike as planned. As I was pouring over my maps looking for an alternate route, a big burly cowboy burst through the doors of the motel and loudly enquired for anyone interested in his shuttle service to the canyon. I signed up and the rest unfolded at a dizzying speed. I was able to leave my car where it was so I ran out to get my knapsack and canteen. Even though I thought I had calmed down quite a bit from my morning trauma, Stan seemed to have sensed something because he gave my shoulder a squeeze and told me that everything was going to be all right and that he will get me there. This time, the ride up to the canyon was filled with laughter, jokes, a few botanical lessons and no snow. By the time we arrived, Stan had convinced me to change my hiking route to the steeper, more openly scenic one and sent me happily on my journey.

I came to Arizona to see and experience magnificent scenery. I wanted to feel my body physically pushed to its limits. After the events of the morning, it dawned on me that I was at a crucial turning point in my life. I was about to graduate and was anxious to start building a life for myself. I thought I knew where I wanted to go, what I wanted to do and how I wanted to live. I wasn't so sure anymore. I needed time to allow clarity, choices and direction to surface. I desperately ached for an opportunity for my soul to speak directly to my heart, unencumbered by mental overdrive. Now, more than ever, this hike represented a pilgrimage.

The descent along the South Kaibab trail was incredible. I have never breathed so fully, sweated so profusely or loved the sound of silence as much. There wasn't going to be much recovery time as the final ascent of the journey was scheduled for the next day. I sat by the Colorado River and watched rafters paddle by. That evening, I ate the biggest steak I've ever seen in my life and met many kindred spirits at the communal dinner table. I awoke at 4:30 a.m. the next morning to get ready to eat at the first sitting for breakfast and was on the trail by 6:00 a.m. It was going to be a tough 14 mile trek up the Bright Angel trail. When I made it up to the top, I ached and shook with goose bumps. Down at the bottom of the canyon, the temperature was 93 degrees Fahrenheit, but at the top, there was frost inlaid in the layers of rock. I was beat and looked spent but I didn't care. In the end, I completed the final stretch shortly before noon. More importantly, I emerged with newfound priorities and a life plan.

I had spent the last one and a half years running myself ragged trying to plan and control my destiny. I didn't acknowledge, much less accept that change was the norm and something to be embraced. The challenge lies in the ability to be present and to live life to the fullest even in the midst of change. The stress that comes with over thinking and over planning is the poison from which ulcers, cancer and heart attacks come from.

Because I was embarking in a career in health care, this was a very important realization. I now know that the more authentic, healthy and whole I am, the more I have to give. By consistently prioritizing specific and timely solitude into my life, I'm able to hear and feel what changes need to be made. The challenge is to trust those transformational messages enough to make changes. By simplifying, re-evaluating and discarding unneeded choices, I strive to create an everyday spiritual life that pays homage to the concept of enough.

I've had two more logic defying experiences, one time again in Arizona by nearly drowning. Sometimes, I do wish that I could learn to reprioritize before the Universe has to throw such large boulders my way in order to get my attention! All I can say is that these pivotal events have resulted in major and at times unconventional life decisions and have served to increase my personal power, allowing my spirit to sing.

Isn't that what the life journey is all about?

A Reason To Sing
Margaret P. Burdick

In art therapy, painted free hand
Two horizontal parallel lengths of lumber,
Solid expression of strength.
The long piece dominant above the short length.

Then the question.

Can you join them?
M-M-M- yes. I take up the brush,
A vertical, slanted same, tie them together.
I m finished.

Turn the paper, move it around
All the way, upside down.
Oh my God!
The rugged cross, barred
By a length of lumber - the self!
The self that keeps me from reaching the cross.

How do you feel?
In bold capitals I paint HELP!
Help for what?
Surprised, speechless, I cannot say.

Pause...silence

Did you Therapist, know, hear
Help was a cry from the soul.
A cry, not of body pain,
Not from bondage of the mind,
But a cry from the soul,
To be drawn back to the cross.

Because of three lengths of lumber
Painted free hand in art therapy.
You heard the cry of a longing soul.
I m thankful you listened,
Understood and persevered.
A caring Therapist.

The cry Help has been heard,
The barrier is down.
The mysteries of the cross
Give peace, comfort and joy.
So with confidence
I RISE UP SINGING

My Eulogy ianna

My heart was heavy
I couldn't sing
But I tried and tried
To work through this thing.

What was wrong?
What was the matter?
Why did I feel
My life was in tatters?

Will I ever be normal?
I often asked
I thought I had proved
I was up to the task.

Well, it never did happen
Guess it's not meant to be
I feel I lived
Another's reality.

Will it ever end?
I often mused
I am often so tired
And just feel used.

I succumbed to drink
A disease they say
But I could never
Look at it that way.

I saw a woman
Very troubled
Who looked for a quick fix
In a double.

It never did
Resolve my pain
That came up
Again and again.

Nothing would work
Nothing I tried
Until this day
That I have died.

Just be happy
Filled with glee
Knowing that finally
I am free.

To have a dream
To know what's right
Was really quite a chore
That often kept me up at night.

I had a purpose here on earth
Of that I'm pretty sure
It never was revealed to me
But I attempted to endure.

I never was a happy camper
Life was such a struggle
I always found I had
One too many balls to juggle.

My saving grace
My will to live
Was in the love
I had for my kids.

They drove me crazy
They kept me sane
They brought me sunshine
To dry up the rain.

Now don't you weep
Now don't you cry
You had your chance
To say goodbye.

Not in a formal way
You say?
Not to worry
It's OK.

It was in the way
You thought of me
When you called me up
So casually.

The things you did
You had a way
The way you noticed
It was not my best day.

Writing was my passion
Of that you can be sure
And never did I intend
To focus on the obscure.

Instead I was driven
To write about my plight

And to offer some respite
To those who couldn't fight.

For some greater good
The spell I was under
Often times
It just made me wonder.

Why was I here?
What was the use?
Did I leave anyone with
A sense of the truth?

Again, don't be sad
Don't be blue
Continue my legacy
If that works for you.

And one final thought
Before I forever depart
Wrap your arms round your waist
And form me - an embrace!

I Rise Up Singing

Katherine Brock

I have looked so hard - yet for years all around it has not been there. It is as though it were hidden from the eyes of those who were intermittent. But whom do you ask? The big screen tells tales of it. You watch in envy as if all along you had just been barely missing it...but darkness surrounds you as it decides to leave and the curtains close. You pick up your feet and take heed. You slip out the back door. The feeling, which just pursed through you as you watched, now brings you to your knees. You check to make sure no one is around. It s just not the same; IT S JUST NOT THE SAME...you yell out. Things weren t always so broken. You weren t always slipping out the back door. Four walls, and a box of Kleenex have just been added to your mental wish list. You pick up your pieces...missing the one that slipped away.

I run for the bus (the wheels-on-the-bus-go-round-and-round). I went back...way back, and I began my process of analyzing. It s a rough journey. It is getting harder to ignore the potholes on this route. From where I am, in my mind...I see it all - except for the bus driver. He s not worth looking at anyway -- I am searching for something more.

Doors open...doors close. A new face emerges. My wish list gets even longer within the moment, as a woman who appears to have no missing pieces gets on the bus. She sits in the middle of course...oh, how perfect! Oh, how balanced. Even the bus driver looks back as I caught a glimpse of his face I before couldn t even see.

It was as though her car broke down - taking the bus was probably her only viable option. She definitely stood out. It wasn t just me.

Getting to her destination was short and effortless. She rang the bell, and then stood up whistling as she walked towards the door. As soon as she got off the bus, I took out my mirror to check myself over...the landscape was terrible - we just entered a construction zone. The mirror in my compact has been cracked ever since I can remember. I keep it because I need the reassurance that there is more to me than meets the eye. Some who know me might think I FELL BETWEEN THOSE CRACKS...BUT SOME DAYS, I KNOW HOW TO LIVE A LIE. Besides, I don t want to break my mother s back. It s a pride thing before the cry. STOP!

Stop - my stop, I almost forgot! I reach for the bell. I question whether the ride was even worth the fare. Excuse me, excuse me, as I work my way through the crowd of other mes. My dad always told me we are all differently the same. I like this way of thinking as it makes me feel a part of the collective hole . (There s a hole in my bucket, dear Liza, dear Liza). You know that place you go to when your head is full. I am told to empty it where no one will know, patching the cracks and filling the holes so no one knows what it really holds.

I step down. The doors close behind me. I am off to my favourite place where there is a whole lot of space - the kind of space, which is the birthing place for holes. This place I come to often...usually to begin again. I tend to choose a spot with the most rocks as their solidity makes me feel secure and anchored. It s nice to sit on the ones still warmed by the day s sun. The river is quite calm today. In many ways, this is my river. I have helped create a water flow with the tears I have shed. Without it, my head would surely be full.

I gander towards the water s edge and can t help but notice a ladybug. It is drowning as it spins to aquatic intoxication. I cup my hand and scoop her up, allowing the water to drain away through my fingers. She isn t moving. I can tell she is just catching her breath. The pause continues...then a wing begins to stretch out...then the other. She is drying them off with what little sunlight there is left. She

shakes herself off almost as though she were letting it go, metaphorically speaking. I watched, fascinated as she cleaned her iddy biddy parts. I chuckle to myself out loud when I tell her she missed a spot. Within a twinkle of a second my hand is empty...she is off...flying free. I saved her. I jumped with glee. I saved her! I rise up singing in the moment (Ladybug, ladybug, fly away home. You are free from the water and again on your own...) for what a glorious moment it is to be witness to a bug drowning, nearly being at rock bottom...to encourage her to live by giving her a hand, to rise up and above...to triumph over adversity!

I must say...life is like a ladybug! If you can spot it.

making macaroni and cheese
(in memory of three friends who died from cancer)
I.B. Iskov

I remember making macaroni and cheese
while Marilyn stood in the doorway
like a movie star
holding her divorce papers
in front of the mirror
thanking her public
for the Oscar
in her new expensive size 9 gown

the stove was on high
the element bright
steam arose like a tulip
the water blossomed
into tiny bubbles

Rhondi whispered
she was pregnant
I whispered I was too
we both refused a free trip to Miami Beach
from a drunk in an Armani suit

Lolly had a party and invited all of her friends
we gathered in an oval crown
coral and jade were sung out loud
the evening turned to wine
within me
no one knew I was pregnant
stirring the macaroni around

I called Marilyn, Rhondi and Lolly
when the macaroni was cooked
a great hunger for warm orange
spread over
heavy silence

My Tidy World
B. O Donnell

In my childhood, by the big green tree
The cutest house I ever did see.

Ev ry morning, according to rule,
I passed, admired on my way to school.

White pleated curtains and smooth red brick,
And a privet hedge trimmed square and thick.

I, in the years after the old man died,
Was shocked to learn what went on inside.

Later, police probed what had been done
Secret, for years, under smiling sun.

Early impressions were all decried
But the victims, now grown, never lied.

The deceit that hid the awful truth
The same that had protected my youth.

This reality cut short my fun
Wonder if something could have been done.

Shielded windows, thorn hedge privacy,
Cold clay behind weeping willow tree.

Brittle in Solitude

Lorna M. Reddick

Sometimes I sit alone
just wanting to die
But, it seems all has
changed now and in
fact, I m still brittle

In solitude, I sit
wondering what I
did wrong and wonder
how brittle the ice is
under my feet.

Will the ice break, melt
or what? What creative
force can it become when
I decide to come out
from under the ice,
looking out and freezing

It is in fact the time of day that
I need to get warm now
and even felling tired, I collapse
into a curled up sleep and hover
over the ice that is so thin.

One crack and I break through the
brittle ice and the noise that it makes,
does not make me feel alone anymore,
I guess I am not the only one around
anymore.

I Rise Up Singing
Madeleine McIsaac

As each day dawns
Past sweet and bitter memories clinging
Think only they are over and done
Surely the best is yet to come
Have faith with me
Very soon you will see
We ll live, laugh and love
So sing to yourself, sing out loud
Just keep on singing
Sing! Sing! Sing!

Hope for the Future
Barbara Hammond

Don t dwell in the past.

Live in the present
 and make today last.

Pray for tomorrow.

Let your life live on.

Hope for the future
 cause yesterday s gone.

Your Hands
Sarah Faulkner

Your hands
are the essence of your being.
in cracks of rough, hard, broken skin
you carry a story.

soft-scented cedarwood in your hands
becomes shelter.
I see your hands build dreams
while you mindlessly weave the miracle
those paint stained cut knuckles
where bandages dangle wounds open,
exposed.

Your hands have brought life to
the tiniest creations and held
little girls hearts within their power
including mine.

I hear you laugh and recall once
nailing your own finger to a roof,
that piece of you
damaged only briefly.

One night in April, you
leaning on the fence post at dusk,
I saw myself take your hand
and brush my cheek
on your worn, wooly sweater,
It was then I knew, I could love you.

Ignominy
Germaine R. Longpré

Futile fight facing baneful blackguard brawn,
Clawing fettered hands, frenzied flailing feet,
He tore the vestment of my unarmored soul
His racing fetid breath against my flaming cheek.

Resounding echoes of his blatant passion
Eternally verbatim in still-motion view.
Debased in odious resignation
I lay repulsed, incensed, in past review.

Could I have done more?

Throe of bruising, tearing flesh of sylph,
Impaling savagery, tauntly scorning filth.
Vile, rescindless act, without replevin,
Inflames horrific rancor, festering dejection.

Could I but feel less!?

Could I but only...(sigh)...forget.

Transcendence

In honour of Dr. Heather McLean, Ph.D.
Maritess Chin

I.

Radiant healer shrouded in divine love and restoration,
commits me to the abyss of unconscious memory.
Psychopathic devils await release,
as their barbaric yawps,
anticipating the cataclysmic horror of revelation,
pulverize my brain.

II.

Numinous knowledge inhabits the marrow of her bones.
Take the journey through hell,
drown in its cesspool,
masticate morbid virulence of generations,
regurgitate all excrement,
and resurrect, my beautiful phoenix, to heaven.

III.

Persevere blindly through the toxic maze,
as the good and gentle healer will not abandon me.
Psyche cradled in her sapient, compassionate hands,
peregrinates to extinction, to be reborn into myself.
Shattered, schizophrenic identity restored.

IV.

Resurrect, my beautiful phoenix.
Resurrect, and sanctify the delusional world.
Sanctify it with love.

On Your Birthday

April A. Severin

Your hands around my throat
you spit offhand,
I could bury you!

These threatening seconds
will not silence
my voice

I will sing my story
beyond today -
our last breath together

Happy Birthday

Where Do You Sit?

Alice Brona

fit in or you're out. Welcome Diversity.
rich is good. Be Content with Enough.
it's all about money. Put People Before Profits.
she's different, she's weird, she's an activist,
she's a feminist, she's a lesbian...don't talk to her.
Isolation Makes Abuse Possible. Build Community.
give to charity. Be an Advocate. Work for Social Change.
you can easily be replaced (at work or as a wife).
There is no Other Person Quite Like You.
that's not my department.
I'll Connect You to the Right Person.
we don't have to give you a reason; we have the power.
Everyone has the Right to be Treated With Respect.
I'm too busy to deal with you.
Can We Work Together On This?

We KNOW There IS a Better WAY
Women Together Will Never Be Defeated.

I Rise Up Singing
Lana Plank

Life;
It can bring me down.
Master;
Because of you;
I rise up singing.
Life;
It can bind me.
My Comforter;
Because of you
I rise up singing.
Life;
It can bury me.
My Savior;
Because of you
I rise up singing.
Life;
When everything feels hopeless,
Redeemer
Because of you,
I rise up singing.
Jesus;
You are my life.
Because of you
I rise up singing.

Untitled
Heather Uksik

The mosaic of our lives is enriched
By those we care for
And though time gallops
And distance widens,
Their presence is woven
Into the fabric of our being.

An Angel
Anne Hathaway

I have seen many things in my life
But I've never seen you before
Where did you come from?
Are you my ANGEL?
I walk a path in my life,
But I'm not sure what for
Will I ever know?
What I am here for?
Each day is a new day
Sometimes pain, sometimes happiness, sometimes sorrow
But I know there is still another tomorrow
So whatever may be today
Will change for tomorrow
Whatever I make of it
It can become my arrow
To shoot straight to the heavens
Of that new tomorrow
I AM THAT ANGEL!

silent scribe
Kyla Bourgh

I never asked what it was like
to wear someone else's skin,
I never knew how it felt to be
inside my own.

I have sat, inside my skin
silently
among speakers
with blood on their teeth.

I have sat, inside myself,
hovering against stones
fastened to my heart
beating upon my skin.

I have listened to swords
cutting through flesh
forced through the marrow.

I have scribed my solemn
song, over centuries
fained and fraught
untamed to speak.

I never asked to feel
estranged to my body
I never knew how it felt
to fit inside my polished shell

I never knew that there was
a danger somewhere inside me
I never knew that this could
betray my sorry self

I never asked to wear my skin
anytime there was a war within
and yet, I don't fit
the armor, cursed
crossed to encase me.

You cannot see inside me
to see beyond this simple form
You ask me to speak my name
to befriend every stone
as simple afterthought
obliged from your hatred spent.

You ask me to say please

and thank-you
to the many forms of shackles
or brands I have adorned

You cannot know what is inside me,
and see beyond this form

You ask me to speak my name
in hope of transcending
anything left
untied, unclean

Yet, you will not hear my song
For the blind fall in other ways.
I will not speak to calm you
and let you sell your simple speech.

I will not speak to soothe you
and allow your discourse
to obstruct my truth.

I cannot let you any strength
I don't have left
the hell I can't abide
will be the only words left
that I may whisper after your scorn

Your words of skin and self
defy to tell you
that all of the secrets and sorrow
that make me who I am
can only make you a mirror
to every silence
forged upon your lips.

Happy Birthday
Mary-ellen Kendall

Happy Birthday little girl.
And what a three years it's been.
I look at your baby pictures, and think of the day they were taken.
You were three months old. You were sleeping through the night.
I couldn't sleep at all. For days and days.
The book said to keep a sleep journal. I did.
And to go to bed at the same time every night. I did.
But sleep wouldn't come.
Then came the panic attacks. Out of nowhere.
I regretted having you.
I had a good life before you came. Now I was an anxious insomniac.
Then came the guilt.
How could I regret being given this precious gift?
This beautiful, healthy baby girl.
You're so lucky, they said.
Then came the fantasies.
Maybe my appendix would rupture and I would need surgery.
The anaesthetic would make me sleep.
Maybe I would get a head injury in a terrible car accident.
The coma would make me sleep.
Maybe I could just die.
That would make me sleep. Forever.
Post partum depression they called it.
The nurse searched my bag.
To make sure I had everything I need, she said.
The therapist asked me to come to group - Reality Orientation.
I was all too oriented to reality, I said. And it's not pretty.
Then there was the excellent advice.
Sleep when your baby sleeps, they said.
If I could fucking do that, I wouldn't be here in the first place, I said.
Don't let the other patients hold your baby, they said.
Over my dead body, I said.
I went out to the dirty kitchen to make myself a snack.
And to be seen talking to others.
So they would write in my chart that I was being more social.
We think you're ready to leave, they said.

Thank God, I said.

The little pills did their work. Oh, so slowly.
There were visitors. And phone calls.
I love you. If there's anything I can do...
I'm here for you. I'm praying for you.
It was a long hard road to recovery.
But now I wake up singing.

Journey to Light
Lisa Beganyi

So many thoughts run through my head now.

I could have died...

ThatThat truck justThat truck just came out of nowhere. Smacked my car right offThat truck just came out of nowhere. See below.

The car splashed into the water. I was screaming but my daughter, The car splashed into the water. I was screaming but I couldn't get my seatbelt undone. Sarah already undid hers, and was trying desperately I couldn't get were we going further under. The water was near the tower were going further under. The water was near the top were going it wasn't coming off.

I told her to save herself.

I looked right at her and yelled, leave me.

SarahSarah justSarah just shook her head, and kept trying. The water was rising - it was at the top of the car now and was rushing in through the open window in the back.

She continued pulling. She continued pulling. She was getting desperate. The car was sinking
the light disappeared and darkness surrounded us.

Amazingly...she did it! A miracle. The belt finally snapped off, and I was free.

We opened the doors, and swam to the surface.

I could see the darkness dissipating as we neared the surface, and we finally broke through to the light...

That was a long time ago, but I still think about it.

What if my daughter wasn't there to help me?

I would be dead.

My daughter helped me when I couldn't help myself, and I am so thankful for that.

Innocence
Kristal-Lee Singh

Does it make you feel like a man, to hurt a small child
Does it make you feel good inside, to destroy such innocence
Does it make you feel powerful, to prey on the powerless
Does it make you feel strong, to strip them of childhood
Does it make you feel proud, to scar them for life.

Does it make you feel gratified, to shatter their dreams
Do you get your small pleasures, from causing them tears
Does it feel satisfying, to rob them of laughter
Does it make you feel dominant, to push till they break.

Does it make you feel something, or do you feel nothing at all
Do you have a conscious, or do you never think twice
And when you look in the mirror, do you like what you see
Because through the eyes of the child, you are a true monster.

Do you feel guilty inside, or does sleep come easy by night
Don't you know that the child lies awake cause of nightmares,
Afraid to close their eyes, in fear of seeing your face.

What gives you the right, to ruin the life of a child
Who's soul is so pure, like that of an angel
But what do you care, you just take what's not yours
You steal their young lives and leave them in pieces.

Do you ever sit and wonder, how the effect of your tortures
Will haunt them forever, like a never ending nightmare
For you sacrifice their purity, to satisfy your insanity
Extinguishing their flames, before they'd had a chance to burn.

But now I have grown from a child filled with fear
To a woman filled with pure will in her heart,
The will to survive all the pain that you've caused
To heal all the scars you left as your mark.

And despite what you've done, I'll rise above and beyond you
With the knowledge that you, are now powerless against me
For truth be told, you're not a man but a coward
And forever you will remain, nothing more, nothing less.

Solace in the Sands

Cindy Fortin

The blue tidal pools reach their outstretched arms across the rippled sand, their salty fingertips slipping away from the ocean's grasp as the rolling waters tug and pull away from them - the sea determined to retreat to the other side of the place it goes. Left behind are the shallow, sandy pools, resigned to warm lazily under the sun until the time that the Pacific rejoins them, its course driven by the tides. The abandoned pools lie passively on their fat, weedy backs, disturbed only by an occasional breeze or an intruder, such as myself.

To be at the beach and not slip my suntanned feet into their warm, swirling waters would be unthinkable. For they, like me, are waiting for the return of a wandering body that has left them in this oddly serene state of upheaval.

The bottoms of my feet sweep across the soft grey and white sand, grazing across its signature ripples like a blind person's hand over brail, the message changing twice daily with the tide. Long-tailed sea onions lay whipped across the shore where they were last tossed; broken seashells glisten beneath the first rays of daylight. Already there is the scent of drying seaweed in the air, enticing barking gulls which circle overhead, their grey silhouettes projected across the sand.

A balmy wind gently carries my hair back from my shoulders, and I lift up the skirt of my light summer dress and step into the first fat pool. Beneath the water tiny creatures dart out from the sand pebbles, always staying a few inches ahead of my toes. They move swiftly to and fro - playfully, it seems - enjoying the warm, tranquil pool as I am. Soon they too, will rejoin the ocean. The bounding Pacific will come back for them, as it always does, swallowing up its biding pools, and scooping up its sea creatures, onions, and shells.

Today, my lover will also return.

I've had a longer spell to wait than my sea bound companions - nearly three months - while he sought out the answers. An engagement, marriage and children, all postponed.

The warm ocean breeze sweeps against my face, and I am reminded of his heated breath against my skin, and of his whispers in my ear during our private moments alone. I struggle to hang onto those memories - to cling to the fading fragments of his embrace.

Oh, how I have waited, and so many times walked out beyond these lazy pools, straining my eyes against the reflective glare of the sea, imagining that he might return with the evening tide, as a sailor after a battle - a sailor rejoining his loved one. He would scoop me up like a pearl shell, and I would melt into the fantasy of his gallant return.

Then I would turn, hopefully - Oh, so many times I would turn and look back across the beach and up at the narrow driveway cut along side our ocean cabin, and imagine the sight of his little red car, its tires crunching against the stone and leaf driveway as he arrived. At the same time I would let out a relieved sigh.

How quickly I would drop all that I was holding - the tiny decorative pieces of driftwood destined for my windowsill, the colourful shells, the ones I found whole, and my shoes, if I was carrying them - and run across the sea-salted sand, back through the tidal pools, and into his outstretched arms.

He'd come back for me, just as he said he might - his head clear, his heart and mind set straight.

But with each day, and each disappointment by his failed return, I fall to the beach, and I lie there, with the wet sand against my back, the returning waters swirling around my feet and legs.

A spray of water touches my lips, and I taste its salt and tip my head up to look at the sea. With my arms and legs outstretched against the sand, I chant an old sailor's prayer written long ago: O sea and surf, I've given myself to thee. Please swallow me up in your warmth and beauty, and share your contentment for being free. Please teach me to be *thee*.

Then at the decline of each day, with my emotions exhausted, I pick myself up, lifting each heavy limb from its place on the sand, and will my body to head back across the beach, through the disappearing tidal pools and up the sandy hill to the cabin that was to be our summer home.

But today is different. I know that, as I stand in the tranquil pool with the creatures swimming ahead of my feet. Soon his little red car will pull up the driveway for real, his triumphant return announced a few days earlier in the letter lying atop of my bedroom dresser.

But when he appears, I will not run to him as I had always imagined I would, I shall only walk avoiding the warm tidal pools as I approach his familiar shape. Even in this moment of victory I will have to find the will to urge my legs on.

He will smile as I come near, his arms outstretched, and my heart will be heavy with the emotion of knowing that this day has finally arrived. He has returned.

Oh, how can I tell him that my heart has let go?

My head is clear now, I will say, my heart and mind set straight. I have a new love, and he returns twice a day to claim what is his, and to change the ripples in the sand.

When it is all over, and his little red car is gone, I will walk back through the fresh evening tide pools out to the ocean's edge, and watch the fiery-orange sun as it sets above the sea. My heart will be fluttering within my chest, my pulse racing to the edge of my soul, but as the ends of the familiar rolling waves swirl about my feet, I'll know I'll be okay.

Cowbird Judie Land

Birds are good for insomniac's lists. I can remember prides of peacocks, schools of owls, and gaggles of geese. I can sing Rockin' Robin, Mama's Gonna Buy you a Mockingbird, and The Bluebird of Happiness. I can recite A bird in the hand is better than two in the bush -The early bird gets the worm - Don't count your chickens before they're hatched. I can rhyme off all those colloquial insults that slide off a little kid's tongue: You're for the birds...Bird-brain...You're going cuckoo. But when I lay sleepless, I cannot repeat verbatim that saying, that bit of folk wisdom, that truism, that says all and nothing. But I can remember the postscript, the bird's last call, as it flew the coop.

It is a long day; cold, a November gloom day. I left home in the dark, have come home in the dark, having read miles, written miles, and heard miles of voices, faint and listless as the last leaves scattering all those miles into tomorrow and tomorrow. The day has been weighted down with heavy books, a heavy coat and heavy eyes. Arms ache; head aches; heart aches.

I can't get the key in lock. Maybe it dreads the empty house too. Door falls open; happy dog bounces out, free at last to chase leaf dervishes and bark impudently at the chill wind. Dump books on card-table; flop on chair to tug at boots, too hot and tight, after a day of waiting for snow which has cheated us again. And there it is, to the side of the stove, up by the hanging utensil basket, written hard black on the white memo board.

He's back early. If he cut the escape short, it must be a good sign. But if he's back, if things are okay, why a note? There are no miles of words, just an architectural note, its rounded, childish writing, centred just so, for absolute attention, dramatic effect.

I remember that heavy coat, not warm enough in that stifling pullman kitchen. I remember the poster that proclaimed, You can't unscramble eggs. I remember the hanging wok and cornbread pan, the spider plant in the window, the violets on top of the beat-up fridge,

and the two cats, watching from the dining room, guarding me carefully, cautiously, quietly. Guarding the peace. But I cannot ever remember the exact words of that ubiquitous saying, even though I saw it in the newspaper, not two weeks ago. Never mind; you know it, the one about setting a bird free, and if it comes back to you, it's yours, and if not, it never was.

Fits with his Kung Phooey, I'm Okay; You're Not so Okay pseudo-philosophy. Psycho-enigmatic crap!, a smart friend of mine once told me, unwisely, too soon. Well, he was back, wasn't he? He had been gone almost two interminable weeks --God knew where or with whom - but he had figured it out. He'd figured out that there was no one else: There was no room for anyone else. The bird had migrated back home.

But, there they were, the next lines. I do remember them - harder to do now than twenty-five years ago -- a strain to pull up from under the headstone I laid on top of them, but still retrievable, mockery intact:
Good luck with Number 3...4...5...6...

There was safety in that tiny kitchen. As long as I stayed there, I could keep that message there, out of the rest of the house. The dismissal, the hatred, wouldn't creep up the stairs, winding around bed legs, wafting over towels, clothing, hair, and settling all over my life. The cold wouldn't rattle the windows, telling the world that he was gone, gone because of a lie, a lie about me, which denied there had ever been a true connection, which allowed him to deny the connection.

We had wiped our slates clean to be together. There had been no real numbers before him, and there

could be no counting after him, but with that message on the board, had left a bleak, new tabula rasa. I could no more erase those last lines than I could the lines of curved laughs, the perfect scar on his back, the crinkle of boundlessly energetic curls. Like someone desperately seeking to read braille in a world of sudden darkness, I ran fingers over and over, playing the words into smudges, like arpeggios gone mad. Finally, sweat or tears rendered them grey wisps of hag's hair, and the cats lay down to wait, and the dog stopped whimpering to come in.

He did not come back, loving me again. And I didn't hear the words so much anymore. Like the emperor's servant who couldn't bear to keep the secret of his majesty's donkey ears, I buried them deep in books, in spring bulbs, in closets, and prayed the whispering would stop. But by and by, I realized that it was not his accusing voice I now heard, but my own, trilling out to be heard, to be released, to sing alone.

If a bird flies out of the nest, and doesn't come back, it is probably a cowbird, gone to ravage some other nest, to push out some other feathery life, so it can lazy-lay its eggs where they do not belong. He looked like a hawk; he sounded like a hawk - but he was only a cowbird, needing to be pushed out, needing to be pushed away, and the nest needing to be cleaned out, so I could rise up singing again.

Running Through A Ritual Passage

Jane Steinberg

I learned to run when I was thirteen.

The events that marked my passage from girl to woman return to me in a haphazard kaleidoscope. I remember the slant of a ceiling and the woodwork where the ceiling met the walls. I remember a shaft of light angling towards me from the top of a window. I remember a kitchen but I have no memory of eating and I can't smell any food. I remember a bathroom. It comes to me with a frightening clarity.

Sitting on the toilet, I am wedged between two walls. The door is out of reach. I sit for a long time. Five minutes, ten. My father is outside the door, his footsteps telling me to hurry up. My pain begins.

The pain finds its centre as a heaviness circling my abdomen and my lower back. It reaches up to where my body is still young and pink nipples, and growing its own soft heaviness. It becomes jagged and persistent. It reaches down between my legs to my wet heart and the yearning that men would later call my jewel.

It is always with me, this pain. I go to sleep with it. I awake in the middle of the night, and arise in the morning, joined to it. Like a best friend, it walks me to school. I am crying. I walk fast, to put the curious eyes behind me. Soon I am running. The heaviness lightens as the jar of the pavement gives a new rhythm to my body. I didn't always need to run at the beginning. My body closed up slowly. What started as only a delay in my being able to urinate gradually became a wait. It was a living thing, this wait, feeding and growing.

At first, my father was resolute in his determination to shun medical attention. Although a doctor himself, he believed that doctors made sick people sicker. He converted this belief into a preoccupation, then nurtured it into an obsession. My mother indulged him with her silence. My body travelled through this silence, its pain ignored by my parents. Today, I realize the enormity of the neglect. I see the sickness that caused my father to quash talk of medical intervention, and the separate sickness that seduced my mother into conspiracy with his delusions.

After several months, my father relented and allowed me to be taken to one doctor. The doctor's examination room was bright and cheery. I have no recollection of being touched. None. Maybe I wasn't. Maybe that was the deal with my father. Maybe I was like water and the doctor just pointed a divining rod in my direction in order to find me and to discover my sickness. Whatever he did, he found nothing physically wrong. It must be in my head, he said.

I took home my head, with my pain safely inside it. I locked it away, only for me because there was no talk of it for a long time after that. It was best to ignore the delusional. I even believed myself that my sickness could not be physical. For a while, the pain subsided. It circled my hips, chastened, before aching to get out. Eventually I let it, having run out of choices.

My body had changed. I felt something between my legs that I intuitively knew should not be there. I felt a bubble protruding from me, hard like a round rubber ball. I lay on my bed, watching the light make a dim pattern on the wall.

The shadow was an elongated dry camel of a hump stretched to breaking. It ended, crying wet and low, between my splayed legs.

I smelled by this time, a fetid squalor of rotting green. The stench of flowers that have sat so long in a vase that their stems are slimy. I was the host of a wretched horror. I was a corpse that beetles feed on. I

was In Cold Blood except I was hot. I was the lumps that people threw up.

Time disappeared for a month. I don't remember sleeping. I don't remember being awake. I'm sure I couldn't run anymore. I was resting in somewhere else, floating, sick, when time came looking for me. He danced on the bed that I had made my coffin, danced so hard that I crawled out from under the covers. I left my bedroom and saw light in the living room. The sun was crashing through the window and joy was a crack in a shattered glass of time, bleeding teardrops.

My mother was shouting. Sludge was pouring down my legs. Lumps of rust coloured tissue joined in a massive dam breaking hemorrhage on the floor. The brown viscous fluid became streaked with red. I was laughing, acquitted of the charge of malingering, the months of blocked menstrual fluid evidence that there was nothing wrong with my head. The pressure in my body was subsiding. I thought if I didn't bleed to death, I might be able to return to myself.

In the years that passed, I ran a lot and I ran fast. When I raced, the air seemed to carry me to the finish line, and deposit me there ahead of everyone else. In every race, my mind left my body to run by itself on the track, letting it find its own zone. When this happened, the track and the distance were no longer obstructed by thought or emotion, by intelligence or stupidity, by common sense or lack of judgement. For this short time, my body was its own ruler. The air around me became lighter and I cut through it, sharp, my body a swift blade. Almost invariably, it was quiet at the finish line because I was there alone. Alone, and with the time to reflect on the life skills my pain had taught me when I was thirteen.

While all this happened a long time ago, some things become the memories that have defined me. Muddy waters that lap around our ankles when we are small are sometimes ringed around our throats when we grow.

I try not to dwell on my pain, though. I think it's true there can be no future without a past and that, to a large measure, our past defines our future. But the past should always be reminded to stay in its place. I've learned that I can't survive in a future where the past is ahead of me, like a sullen beacon, tempting me forward then blocking my path. So I try to keep the past at bay, at my heels. I try to hear what time taught me that day he brought me the sun.

Now I grow older. Like a magpie, I search for the glittering light that I can kick out of gravel, and steal a love that delights on night wings, flying.

I still run today but not as fast.

Rise Up Screaming - Feminism 101

Patricia Stockwell

I am about six years old and very proud. This is my second week in grade one and I love school. Already, I have made a friend and she's sitting in the desk right beside mine. She has the same first name as me, only Mrs. Augustine, our teacher, calls me Patty and her Pat, so as not to mix us up.

This is fun, says Pat. I didn't know we'd get to colour pictures in school.

Yeah, I like to colour, I reply. Do you have a fireman and a policeman in yours?

Yes, and a sec-a-tary and a mommy too.

Now children, the teacher announces. Please notice that the pictures you are colouring are all jobs that adults do in the real world. One day, you may do one of these jobs.

All of a sudden, something dawns on me. I feel my stomach start to tighten and my hand makes a fist all on its own. I don't realize it, but I am getting angry. Pat, I whisper in a hoarse voice, why do you think the men have all the good jobs like firemen and policemen and the women are all teachers or nurses or mommies?

I didn't know it then, but I had just had my first lesson in Feminism 101 - grade one style. Those early awakenings sparked a fire in me but it wasn't until I was 40, had left my husband, moved from a small secluded community to a big city that I became a full-fledged all-out ranting and raving feminist.

I am living in London and working at the University of Western Ontario. It is December 6, 1989. The headlines in all the major newspapers scream 13 women murdered at Montreal university. My oldest daughter is at Brock University in St. Catharines and right away I think of her. Shock, dread and fear envelop me, then anger. How could this happen? The papers say the guy walked in with a shot gun and systematically separated the women from the men and then just as systematically shot the women while yelling I hate feminists. That's when I realize none of us are safe. It's dangerous to be a woman and it is even more dangerous to be a feminist. You might as well just announce, I am a man-hating, ball-busting, card-carrying bitch.

I go to work with a heaviness in my heart and a churning in my stomach. Everyone is talking. We work at a university. It could happen here. What's so different about this university? The word goes out - a minute of silence is planned at all the campuses. At five minutes to twelve, a dozen or so people (at a campus of 600) gather at the flagpole in front of Althouse College. The student council president - the male student council president - speaks. We are gathered here because I guess some students were killed in Montreal today. I was instantly furious. No mention that these students were women - or that they were murdered - or that it was not just a crazed gunman like everyone was saying - it was a misogynist - a woman-hater. Was I crazy? Was no-one else putting the pieces together? This is like the sixteenth century witch-hunt. It is a war against women and this guy is just acting out the extreme of what goes on behind closed doors in homes every day all over the world. I can't take it any longer.

I march through the snow banks in my high heel open-toed shoes. (I am still wearing high heeled shoes.) A calmness steals over me and I speak very loudly, not yelling but loudly. Thirteen women were murdered today because they were women and they dared to enter a male domain. They were all engineering students and they were shot down in their youth because some man did not want them to break the status quo. There is dead silence. The ball-busting, raging bitch of a feminist has spoken.

I turn and walk silently through the parting crowd, holding my emotions in check. I head straight for the women's washroom, pull the door shut, sit down on the toilet seat and begin to weep. I can not stop. The tears are flowing for the women in Montreal, for the witches of the sixteenth century, for my daughters, for my mother, my grandmother, and her mother, but most of all for that little girl in grade one who was told, Women can't be engineers.

Simon
Marsha Ellen Meidow

What lies before us
and what lies behind us
are tiny compared to
What lies within us.
- ?

Today I remember you.
The way you played your guitar over the phone late at night.
It made me feel better, and it felt good to make you laugh.
Remember when you laughed so hard that milk came out your nose?
Or how about that day you walked in on me wearing nothing but a tie...
All you did was politely turn around and mumble, You look good in gold, Marsha.
I respected you for that, but I forgot to tell you.
You were my best friend's first love, and you even shared the same birthday.
You were a cancer. How ironic.
I was your best friend's girl, but that was never really talked about.
It never stopped you from flirting with me, but you were great at justifying things like that.
He hated it when I took my shoes off, but you thought my toes looked beautiful in the grass.
So we got him with a big old bucket of water because we all knew that days like that didn't last forever -
That somehow friendship means a whole lot more when summer lasts an eternity.
Remember when we smoked fifty cigarettes in a row while we sat in those big kitchen sinks?
We hardly fit - but somehow we managed.
Now whenever I see Cigarettes Cause Cancer I am overcome by guilt.
But I don't know what that means.
I would sit in awe watching you fly on that skateboard. Like you were a bird. Or an angel.
You were a wicked skater, but I forgot to tell you.

Then you got sick - just like that.
I can't remember the month. It's hard to remember at all because I still don't believe it.
Probably never will.
I never knew you my whole life, never spent kindergarten together.
I wasn't that lucky.
I wish I could have just one more moment with you, one more secret kiss on my doorstep.
But I never told you that.
You looked really old in that hospital bed, and I felt I didn't belong there because I couldn't find the
right words to bring back those forty pounds.
Somehow you still found it in you to laugh because your mom thought those vitamin C chewables had
the power to make it better.
And I'm sure they did - but morphine has a way of grabbing you and never letting go.
I realized that when I came to see you at home.
We all knew what it meant when you went home.
No one talked about it.
I could tell just by looking at you that you were already far away.
I was in love with you - but I forgot to tell you.
Not long after I got the call - your lung had collapsed.
You were barely seventeen years old.
Tears in Heaven became your song.
Time can bring you down.
Time can bend your knees.

Time can break your heart, and leave you begging please.
Begging please.
People laugh because I carry a bear around.
His name is Simon - after this amazing angel that I know.
Whenever I get to missing you I hold him close to my heart, and I squeeze him just tight enough
So that you can hear all of those things that I forgot to tell you.
Sometimes when I look up at the stars it is almost like you can hear me.
They say that all kids with cancer have an automatic spot in Heaven.
I wouldn't believe any different.
Today, I remember you.

A Song

Petryna Venuta

I

August, 1983

Though the sun has been childish all morning, hopping behind clouds pulled as thin as old white hair, jumping behind the trees to splash green light onto the porch floor and burning the gardenia into bright light, it is now hot, grown up, and angry. It is a white eye smouldering a little hole in the back of Evelyn's head as Josephine stands on the porch with her mouth wide open in a silent scream, rubbing her hands against her thighs, her ribs aching with a profound heaving. Evelyn tries to keep her eyes on a gold and blue beetle that settled in front of her open-toed sandal. It wiggles in the sightless light, shaking out one hind leg. Evelyn thinks of harnessing the beetle and attaching a chain so she can pin it to her dress where the living bead will crawl in circles all day.

Josephine weeps for at least a quarter hour before wiping her hands over her face like a pair of cramped kerchiefs. Her creamy blouse is wrinkled where she's pulled it out of her black pants. The crease down her legs is as sharp as scissors pacing across the floor.

How could you do it mother? She asks with a muffled shriek. *Snip snip* her legs whisper.

Her face keeps moving like a collapsing house. Evelyn just watches it fall, not trying to get out of the way, but her chest is cramping, curling into itself, seeking shelter.

They are my girls. Mine. Josephine turns quickly and nearly topples over the banister.

Goodbye, bye, bye, she whispers in a choking clumps of syllables. *Snip snip*. And then she rolls down the stairs, turns the corner, and is gone.

Evelyn's hands tremble. The cup of tea in her hands is cold, and when she tries to sip it, the coolness makes her tongue sick. She throws the tea over the banister and watches it splash into the maple leaves.

The tea cup is a favourite of Evelyn's. Her daughter made it for her in her first pottery class, before the girls were born. It is a heavy yellow cup with an ornate handle curling in toward the lip then back into the thumb. There are thin white birds flying around the outside rim -- one clean stroke of the brush to make those birds. The yellow paint is brilliant and mute from the base to the rim. It is at least fifty shades of yellow so subtly changing that it is one colour having grown weak and dark in the hot oven. Evelyn does not realize how hard she is gripping the cup until it squeezes out of the bottom of her grasp, falls against the porch, squashes the beetle, and breaks into hard chunks and needle slivers.

II

March 1994

No, no, I never knew her. Evelyn turns her head slowly from side to side and picks up her teacup. Her hands tremble slightly. She puts her cup back into its saucer and starts rubbing her hands.

Yes, you remember her Grandma. Jackie pours herself a cup of tea. Her fingers poke at a biscuit. She was the woman who lived out in Dixon's Corner in that little cabin. She was here once selling her paintings. My mother bought one.

Jackie, I never knew her. Her head begins to throb. Her oldest granddaughter was admitted to hospital when the girl's own hand grew too cruel on her own body and now her youngest granddaughter is trying to force remembrances into her head.

Jackie hears the tone more than she hears the words so she pushes half of the biscuit into her mouth. Her grandmother knew Harriet Harold, there was no doubt.

Well, anyway, Harriet made it out. She's in the city, making her paintings for the government.

Good for her.

I think so. Jackie had met Harriet many years ago when she was riding her bike out in the dusty roads of Dixon's Corner. She had fallen, and broken the skin on her knees and palms. Harriet found her, sitting on the side of the road.

Try to miss the cars, little girl, there are no accidents out here.

Jackie looked at her.

You're still a child. Still in the crook of the machine.

Jackie still didn't understand her. Harriet looked disgusted at the girl's incomprehension, snorted through her nose, and hobbled off. Her brown dress and black boots looked like witch's garb to Jackie's young imagination and she instantly hated Harriet Harold. It became new lingo in the playground -- the most severe, pejorative criticism became *you're a Harriet Harold*. As Jackie got older, searching for the woman's house and double-dog-daring someone to go in to sip juice from her refrigerator was her gleeful, vomit-inducing, shrewd game.

III

July, 1974

Josephine is a clever girl. Talented, too. She sings and plays guitar better than Baez. She has walnut hair that rains in one sheet around her shoulders, glistening in the afternoon sun like the single scale of a wet fish. She might have done anything, supported any number of her whims and fancies, but today she is marrying Gary Lloyd, her belly still tight with early pregnancy.

Josephine's town is a dusty town, caught in the windy corner of a Canadian province and is lived in by dusty people and their dusty hands. There might be two girls -- any two girls in this town or another -- whose future is intertwined or overlapping, but by a slight chance or choice, each ends absolutely separate from the other in demeanour, housekeeping and ambition. In our youth, we dream of places away from our experience but as we age, we are drawn to that which comforts us. Sometimes this can be something as simple as preparing dinners the way we remember them being prepared and relaxing in the smells that rise in the kitchen. Sometimes it is in the way we fold the sheets together or sing to our children. Sometimes the comfort manifests itself in something more severe. Like a hard cold person. If this happens, no matter where the two of you are, the dust from the original town will remain on your hands.

Josephine rarely receives visits from her mother because she says she does not like Gary. She says to her daughter the morning of the wedding *why choose a man like your father -- why didn't you learn -- I learned - didn't I teach you anything?* When her mother does visit, Josephine drinks her tea from a thousand-hued amethyst-purple coffee mug with a handle large enough to fit four fingers. She found it at a yard sale when the Marauder family was packing up to move into a house on Henry Street next to the old Harold place where the great-great-great-grandfather, who used to ferry visitors across the river, was convicted of the murder of seven strangers who had come to this town for a summery change of perspective but never made it off the boat.

After Evelyn receives custody of her grandchildren, her daughter is never heard from again.

IV

April, 1994

Jackie puts the kettle on the stove to boil. Two months ago, she discovered that Harriet Harold had been in her mother's grade at Elmsdale Collegiate. Jackie is the yearbook editor and though she takes the position seriously, she has recently used it to her personal advantage in the Chronicle's basement, which houses old copies of the E.C. yearbook. She found a picture of the two girls, toothy smiles and thick hair, arms generously wrapped around each other. Two lives that were interchangeable in youth but Harriet grew out of the town and Josephine is buried in it.

Evelyn does not want to confide in Jackie, and Jackie thinks that her grandmother drinks tea because hot water scalds the tongue. Because silence is better than speech.

Jackie taps the counter with her fingers in time to the song on the radio. Suddenly, she jumps and runs into the living room.

Listen Grandma, Jackie shouts. Then the radio is turned up loud and the pulsating, billowing waves of Joni Mitchell pulse into Evelyn's bedroom where she's been watering the plants.

Turn it down, Jackie. She wipes her hands on her skirt and marches into the living room.

Jackie is laughing, swinging her hips and kicking her bare feet on the carpet. Evelyn moves toward the radio and Jackie scoops her grandmother's hand into her own and dances with her.

Jackie, stop it. This is nonsense.

Of course it is. Dance Grandma, dance with me.

Jackie throws her head back and laughs. It sounds slightly of her mother's tinkling peals, almost of her sister's sounding smiles.

We made it Grandma.

What on earth has gotten into you?

Today. Life. The music. C'mon, Gran, sing with me.

Stop it Jackie. But she says this warmly, with the corners of her mouth creasing pleasantly.

The kettle begins to whistle and Jackie dances her grandmother into the kitchen, singing at the top of her voice.

Mother
Marsha Ellen Meidow

I wanted so badly to raise my hand in class
To put up my arm and wave it frantically
To protest that I was once a mother to two babies
But I cannot tell cute stories in the grocery store
To fellow mothers about diaper rashes or staying up late at night
I stay up for very different reasons
I made the horrible decision to fall in love with a broken boy
But somehow a part of me looked past his past
Had I come to realize he was his drunken father reborn
I would have run
But please believe me, merciful jury -
You cannot run when you are too widdled down to even stand!
And somehow I tried to find romance in nights spent
Under the weight of a boy brought home
By the boys in blue
Flowers got replaced by bottles and somehow we seemed to move further and further out of town
This only left the trees to hear our screams
To bend their branches over to look in through broken windows
I have never been a stupid girl.
But I do beg for your forgiveness for trying to fix everything -
Especially him.
While he was away I would scatter around the house trying to
Find myself
My body was in parts all over that chicken shack
I only longed to have my heart and my sanity back.
My mother is always right - careful what you wish for.
You just might get it.
For the thousandth time he went too far with my sanity
And I found the strength to run 3500 miles back to parents
Who were the only ones who could cool the volcano
Even before I took the test I already knew the answer.
It is hard to make sane decisions
When you forget what that means
I wanted to believe that this would be the tiny one

Who would erase it all and heal the wounds of a boy
Who would hide from himself -
Now that he was too old to hide from Daddy.
He pleaded that it would get better.
That the violence would stop
And the lines of bottles on the windowsill
Would be replaced by legitimate sun-catchers.
But it never stopped.
It never stopped.
Every time my heart skipped a beat and the fear grew in my throat
I could feel the tiny angel inside of me becoming scared as well.
Trying to break free so she could save her mother,
And they could escape for good.
But my beautiful little one became a pile of pain -

I woke up in an ocean of blood.
As I dragged myself across the floor I could not help but notice
How vibrant the red looked against his mother's white kitchen floor
At emergency the receptionist shook her head at me
She only wanted to know how I could have let my health card expire
If I had the strength I could have easily wrapped my hands around her throat
But that would make me everything that I fight against
At that moment none of it mattered anyways.
Jail didn't scare me now that my baby was dead.
I pleaded with anyone who would listen to take him away
Please throw away the key.
Dear honourable judge -
This delinquent has murdered my precious child.
Don't tell me
No one really knows why these things happen.
For one moment please look beyond my crazy hair and undesirable clothes,
And the fact that you think I am just a baby myself.
I have spent five years outside, which makes me about a hundred years older than even you.
Please look in my dead eyes and know that I only want to see him pay.
I want him to live a life of guilt, and to see how sour silence can be.
I will never know why I stayed with the person who took away
everything that I had.

I could never give enough evidence that would help verify why
I would become pregnant with his child again.
This pain is too heavy.
The first destroyed by his hands, the second by my own.
I tell myself everyday that I did the right thing.
I could not give him the chance to place one single bruise on my child.
He promised me when I left that he would surely kill me.
He told me that disgusting pigs do not deserve babies.
That is the most truthful thing I have ever heard from his poisoned breath.
Except he never realized that I wasn't the pig.
And he didn't deserve anything.
These are things we cannot explain.
I would rather carry the horror of killing my own baby
Than let him haunt her for the rest of her life.
I have lied to many, and told them she left on her own.
The shame being far too much to bear.
You may find me guilty -
because I am.
But I stand before you with my hands to the sky.
I promise I would have been a good mother.
I am a good mother.
I am a good mother who prays everyday that there
Really is a Heaven,
And that my children are there waiting for the day
That their mother finally decides it is time to come home.
We are survivors.

The Flower-encrusted Monastery

L.A. Henry

I will knit my words with soiled grace
stolen from the leaves
purloined from the branches
of other lives.
No one knows
guesses
the world is so many minds.
I will mine these depths for dirt encrusted gold
I will forge it in the fire of my own imagination
refined.
To will is to act.

The smooth surfaces of cut stone
that form the window ledge at the monastery
are overlaid with climbing flowers. Red, purple
broad petaled with dangling pistils.
So much reproductive energy.

Deep need the cyclical permanence
of regeneration
but I crave more.

Why stop? Why settle?
Inside is deeper life
further in, farther up
up to the altar.
Passion beats against passion and I must die
to rise up singing
in His life.

He creeps in through crevices
in our hearts, through our sleeping thoughts,
through our bodies needs
that we might know.

The roses sleep in the garden
wet petals folded
awaiting the gardener's touch.
Hearts wait together, like a cloud
like a rose unfolded
like little jewels who know no mind other than love
little lives given in great love
for His great love
little passions surrendered to great passion
in the common grace
of death to self
as self beats against fragrant self
in pregnant vulnerability.

A Turning Tide

Shelley Robinson

The injustice of the tide is that it never knows where it belongs, on the beach or in deep waters.

I finally feel as though I am taking a complete break. The sun persuades me to stretch out and lean against one of the beached logs that has seen its time of sand and water. I conform to its smooth warmth and watch a tugboat glide by in the distance, etched hazily in the heat against a neighbouring island. The sound of water anxiously pushing to shore and hesitantly retreating, teases my son as he tries to fill his bucket. Today, I finally feel relaxed enough to focus in and take a mental snapshot of the day. It is also a day where I balance precariously between my past and future, anxious about looking back and tentative about moving forward.

I almost missed this chance by sleeping in and missing our flight. After some finagling on the phone to the airlines by my husband who was still blurry eyed with sleep and incensed by my teariness, we made it. Simon cried for a few seconds leaving Daddy behind at the departure doors, but once offered a tour of the plane by the stewardess, things improved. Simon's vocabulary expanded during the inspiring airplane experience, with generous sound effects through our journey. My first plane adventure as a mother of a toddler delivered us safely into the capable warmth of our hostess. Hannah's mission seemed apparent from the beginning. She seemed to sense my need to experience the island city of Victoria and find some of my own air to breathe in a new place for a while.

Walking on the beach alone with Simon, we stop occasionally to inspect a pink rock or a white one. I reflect back on the soothing attention given to me by Hannah in our first couple of days as we acclimatized to the moisture and warmth. Her comments like, I've planned everything. You're simply to enjoy, allowed me to follow her direction with relief while I regained my steam. Simon's endearing West Coast discoveries of beaches and blackberries were endearing to all, and we travelled together living vicariously through each of his new experiences. As I listen to the ocean swell in and out, I marvel at Simon's endurance for trailing back and forth from the surf to a hollow in the sand, delivering water and sand either way with his little red bucket. I speculate whether I should make a phone call tonight. It's Sunday. The rates are cheaper. My husband would probably wonder why I wouldn't call, but then maybe he wouldn't.

I spot a solitary figure in the distance approaching slowly and stopping occasionally to look out at the ocean alive with sunny sparkles and foamy white bubbles. As the figure draws nearer, I identify a man in his early thirties. Because of his distance from me and his slow progress, I have time to create a character of him. He's a lonely sort, widowed perhaps, and he doesn't have children. Educated, maybe, but obviously happily employed judging by his nice apparel of a relaxed cardigan and corduroy pants. I am not prepared to say hello until I see his eyes and can tell if they are friendly.

When he is only a few feet away, I notice the brown hair with signs of gray. His eyes are green and smile in a twinkley way as he leans over to inspect my son's magical hole in the sand that makes water disappear. Greeted with this amount of unexpected attention, Simon's chubby hands come up to cover his face and he leaps into my arms with embarrassment.

He's sure a Blondie. The man appears to sense my apprehension about talking to the only other person on the beach, so he plants himself comfortably on spot and makes no attempt to come closer. He looks a lot like you. I'm always pleased to hear this comment because it strikes a narcissistic chord in me, and I relax as he continues. My daughter who is ten still has the shocking blond hair that she was born with. I feel compelled to carry on the conversation. Is she your only child?

Yes. A tentative flicker of self-revelation crosses his eyes, but it is denied and he doesn't expand on it.

We both shift our gazes to the ocean. I feel very relaxed by his presence and feel like encouraging him to continue talking. This is the third day of our holiday on our own and we just can't get enough of this ocean. I guess it's because we're from the prairies.

He looks at me intently. Your husband must miss you both. Simon squeals excitedly as he holds up a long strand of bright green seaweed, distracting me from direct eye contact with him on this question.

Well...it's a busy time for him at work, I answer, tickling Simon as I send him back to the water with his ocean offering.

Somewhere as the conversation unravels, we establish trust, whether it is through our eyes or somewhere in between our words. He props himself up against another enormous log. Before my wife died, I was a professor of economics at the University of Victoria. My prediction of him being a widower brings me no satisfaction. I watch a wash of distant pain change his features. His sharp green eyes dull slightly as his intense brows knit together. So, what do you do now? I want my question to distract him from it.

Write, mostly, and lecture here and there. It gives me more time at home with my daughter, and the money isn't bad either.

You're very lucky to do what you want in a place you love. I hesitate before regaling on about my teaching career before Simon's time. He listens intently and I feel no obligation to leave out details as I spill on about liking to be a stay-at-home-mom, but missing my profession.

It's quite a sacrifice you're making, he confirms. I felt the same way when I stopped teaching. I miss it.

Part of me is standing back assessing how good it feels to have enough thought spent on me to be understood. A complete stranger is offering me a lot more than he can possibly realize. He catches me daydreaming, I've lost you somewhere, he says. I look up guiltily at the teasing expression on his face, and turn to Simon who is getting braver as he wades into the water submerging socks and shoes. It doesn't matter because he is happy and I am relaxed.

It's too bad that you don't live around here because my sister's school is needing a music specialist.

Ideas and fantasies sprout all over the place in my head. Really? I respond wistfully. Another lifetime, but not this one. The idea would never wash with my husband and would only alarm my family. It is too painful to even daydream about. Our conversation moves to other topics: tourist attractions, places we'd both travelled, plans for our futures. Time sneaks by until Simon starts complaining for juice. My new friend takes his hint to leave, but hands me his business card without hesitating. I've enjoyed our conversation and I hope that someday our paths will cross again. We both smile amiably into each other's eyes. He tells me that I am still attractive at thirty and mine says that he is very special, and then we part. I watch Dan Saunders, introduced to me now by his card, walk away. For a moment I had felt truly connected with someone, and I am moved by a sense of loss.

Hannah's hugs and farewell kisses send us through the departure gates and onto our plane. I feel a fog fill my mind as we travel and land at various stopping points. Anxiety fills me as we get closer to home. I ring for the stewardess and she smiles at Simon asleep in my lap. How do I use the air phone? I am unfamiliar with the technology.

She explains. My hands shake as I dial the number with the insane conflicting hope that he will answer and not answer. I know that I will never call again after we land. His voice at the other end reassures me

that I have made the right decision. I m not certain if you remember me. I am the woman you talked with on the beach?

He responds warmly, Of course, hello.

I take a second before continuing. If I were to give you my address, would you mail me information about that job you told me about...at your sister s school? I m not sure how it will turn out, but I think it is time that I start making some decisions.